

Sergei Mikhalkov

a choice for children





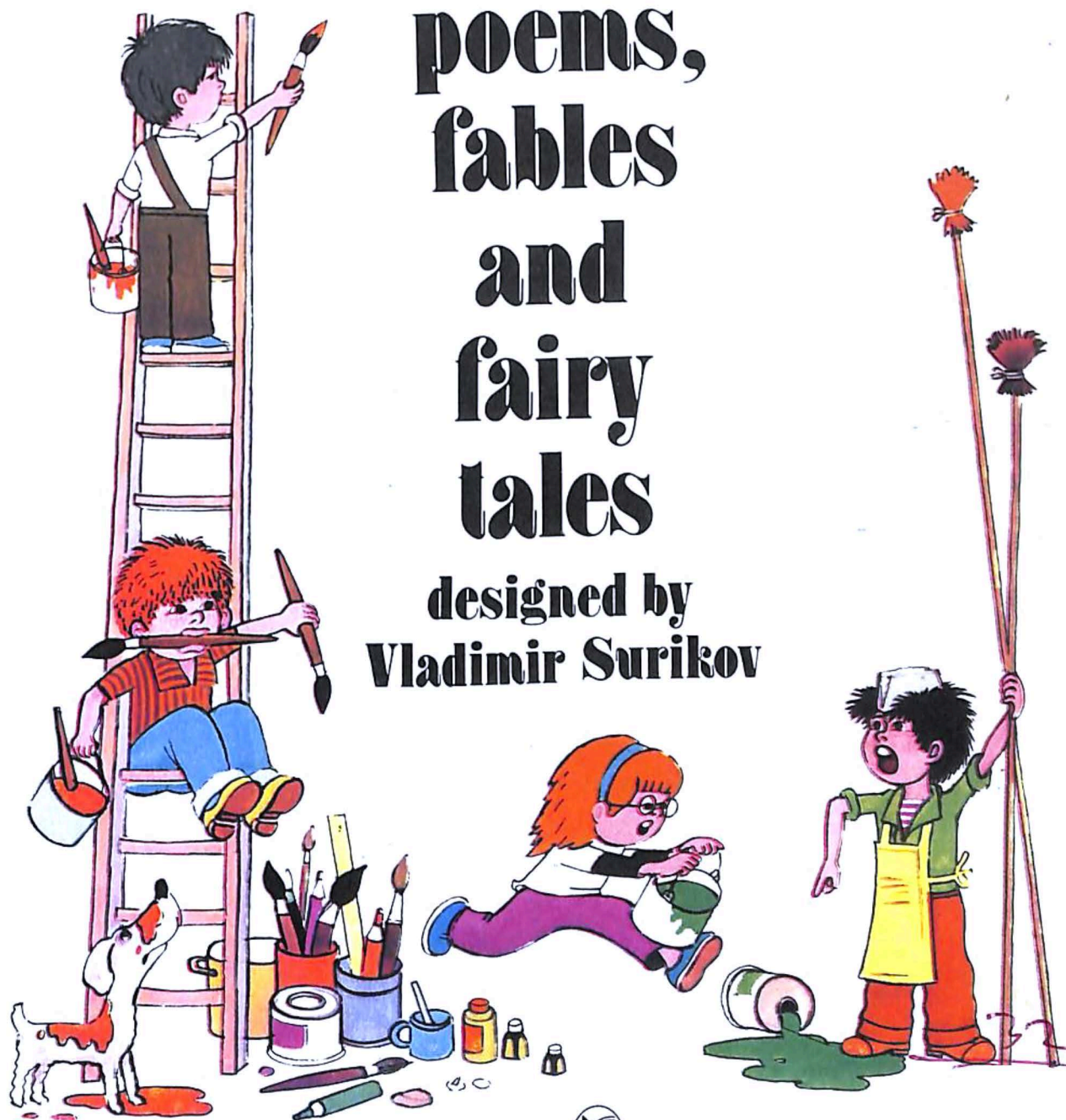


Sergei Mikhalkov

a choice for children

poems, fables and fairy tales

designed by
Vladimir Surikov



raduga publishers • moscow

СЕРГЕЙ МИХАЛКОВ

ИЗБРАННОЕ

На английском языке

REQUEST TO READERS

Raduga Publishers would be glad to have your opinion of this book, its translation and design and any suggestions you may have for future publications.

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Translation from the Russian

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DEAR CHILDREN!

I don't remember exactly when I first dreamed of becoming a poet, but I began writing for you and about you from the age of twelve.

Ever since then until this day I have written poems, fairy tales, fables and plays for children.

This book includes what I believe to be the best of my work.

When you have read the book through, I think you will see why I like to write for you.

*With deep respect,
Sergei Mikhalkov*

from five to twelve

poems



WHAT HAVE YOU?

Some were sitting on the bench,
Some were looking down the street,
Tolya whistled,
Boris sang,
Nick just sat and swung his feet.

It was near the end of day,
They had tired of their play.

In the sun a puppy lay,
On the fence a sparrow sat,
When we heard somebody say,
Just like that,

“Look, I’ve got a nail, now say
What have you?”

“We have visitors today,
What have you?”

“Yesterday our cat had kittens,
They have fur as soft as silk;
They’re all black with snow-white

mittens,
But they won’t drink any milk.”

“Now we have a cockatoo,
What have you?”

“My big brother has a pair,
There!”

“From our window, way up there,
You can see the big Red Square,
And from your big window-seat,
Just a little of the street.”

“We were walking in the park,
Just the other afternoon,
And we bought a lightish-dark,
Bluish-yellow toy balloon.”

“First of all, we had no light,
All last night;
Then they’re bringing coal today—
So they say.



In the fourth place, my Mamma
Will be flying off again,
For you know that my Mamma
Is the pilot of a plane."

Vova answered from the stairs,
"She's a pilot? Well, who cares?"

"Now, I have a cousin, Anne;
Her Mum's a militiaman.

"And I know two pioneers
Who have Mummy-engineers.
Vera's Mum's an acrobat.
Mum's a pilot?
What of that?"

"More important than all others,
Surely, are tram-driver mothers;
And my Mummy," Nata said,
"Drives a tram-car with two trailers."

Nina shook her little head,
"What is wrong with Mummy-tailors?
Who would sew the children's clothes?
Mummy-pilots, I suppose?"

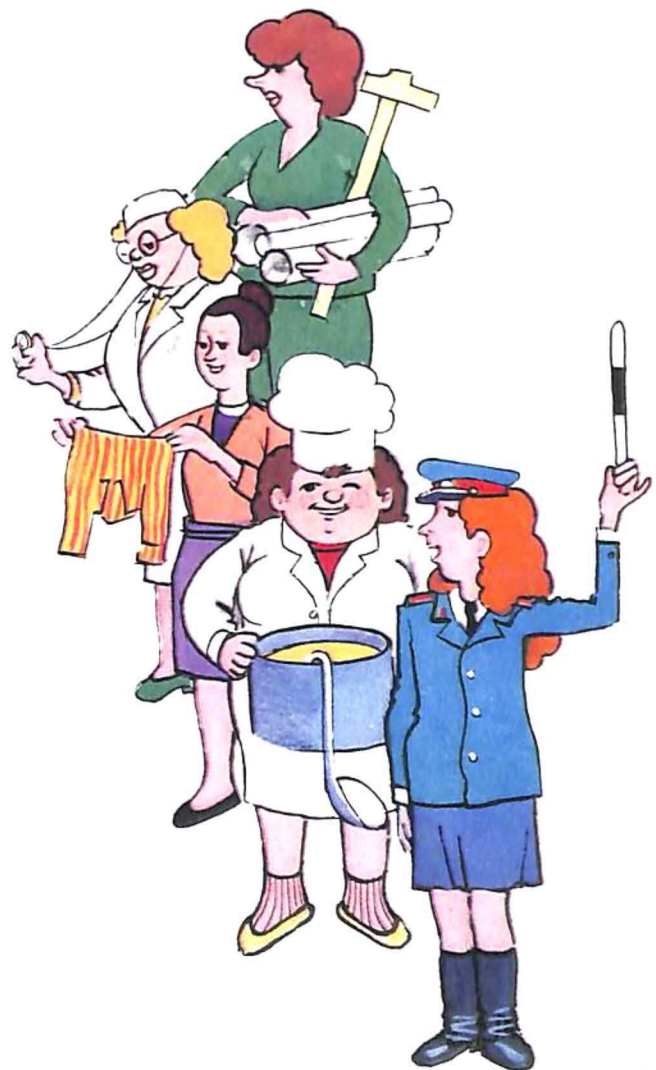
Pilots fly both day and night,
That is very good and right.

Mummy-cooks prepare our food,
That is very right and good.

Mummy-doctors cure the flu,
Schools have Mummy-teachers, too.

Mums are all important, mind.
We need Mums of every kind.

It was near the end of day,
They had nothing more to say.



THE HOTHOUSE PLANT



Who is lying tucked in bed
Under blanket, quilt and plaid?
Who needs half a dozen pillows
For a single silly head?
Who's the good-for-nothing fellow
Who won't rise until he's fed?
Who must wash in lukewarm water
Lest the flu should lay him low?

Maybe he's some shaky dotard
Born a hundred years ago?
No!

Who, with mouth stuffed full of pastries,
Wails and whimpers, lying flat:
"Give me this!"
And "Fetch me that!"

Maybe it's a helpless patient
Or a cripple speaking so?
No!

Who then is he?
Tell me why
Do his parents pile him high
Though it's almost mid-July
With all sorts of furs and woollens,
Mittens, scarves and felt boots too,
So he shouldn't chill his tonsils
Or be murdered by the flu?

P'raps he's going to the Pole
Where the bears from ice-floes call?
Not at all!

No, he's not a polar rover.
He is simply Master Vova,
Mummy's Vova,
Daddy's Vova
From the seventh flat upstairs.
It is he who lies in bed
Under blanket, quilt and plaid
Eating nothing but sweet pastries,
Plums and oranges and pears.

The very minute he awakes
Mum his temperature takes.
Then they dress him
And caress him
And at any time of day
Bring him anything he'll say.

If he stays in bed till late
No one wakes him—school can wait.
If they spot a single cloud
Out of doors he's not allowed.

Now, to finish off my story,
To be frank, I cannot see
What can such a sop be good for;
Nothing much, you must agree.

Neither can he be an airman
Nor a driver on a truck,
Nor a gunner in the Army,
Not a seaman—that takes pluck.

Such is Vova, eight years old,
Growing up afraid of cold
Like a pot-plant under glass,
The biggest sissy in his class.





MY PUPPY

I had lots of fuss today
When my puppy ran astray.
Almost two whole hours I spent
Calling, waiting in torment,
Couldn't eat or do my homework,
Quite upset by the event.

Long before
The break of day
From its couch it stole away
And at once began to run,
Yelping,
Waking everyone.

Taking fancy to my blanket,
On the floor it tried to yank it.

To the parlour it came running
And upset a jar of honey.

Daddy's poem it tore up,
Fell downstairs, unlucky pup,
Stuck its forepaw into glue—
Then
It vanished out of view.

Maybe someone came and stole it,
Led it off upon a string?
By another name they call it—
Make it guard their home, poor
thing...

Maybe in a gloomy wood
Sits my puppy, lost for good,
Never to come home again,
Sulking, soaking in the rain?

How was I to rescue it?
Mother said:
"Let's wait a bit!"

Two long hours I sat there waiting,
Couldn't read and couldn't draw,



Quite forgetting paints and pencils
Just sat waiting, sad and sore.

Suddenly
A dreadful beast
Through the half-shut doorway
squeezed,
Limping in on muddy paws.
Who was it?
My pup, of course!

What had happened?
My poor pup
I could hardly recognize:
Cheeks all scratched,
Nose swollen up,
Awful bruises near its eyes.
Stinging, buzzing angrily,
On its tail-tip sat a bee.

Mother told me, "Shut the door,
Or you'll let in the whole swarm!"

Tucked in bed, my puppy lies
Till it's sound and hale,
Far too weak to drive off flies
With its bandaged tail.

I don't need a doctor's help—
No, I'll cure my pup myself!



A cartoon illustration of a young boy with dark, spiky hair and freckles, wearing an orange shirt and blue pants, running quickly. A small brown and white dog is running alongside him, looking back over its shoulder. The background is plain white.



All aboard! Don't delay!
We are riding off today,
Very gay and spunky,
With our little monkey,
Cat, cock, dog and parrot, too—
Better friends you never knew!

When everyone is friendly,
What can be better fun? *
You never need to quarrel,
And you love everyone.
So, when you go out riding,
Don't leave your friends behind;
Not only will they help you,
It's merrier, you'll find.

All aboard! Don't delay!
We are riding off today,
Very gay and spunky,
With our little monkey,
Cat, cock, dog and parrot, too—
Better friends you never knew!

We sang, while we were riding,
Our jolly song, and then,
Together as we started,
We all rode home again.
The gentle breezes kissed us,
The sunbeams said, "Good day",
And we all sang in chorus,
As we sped on our way.

All aboard! Don't delay!
We are riding off today,
Very gay and spunky,
With our little monkey,
Cat, cock, dog and parrot, too—
Better friends you never knew!



ANDRYUSHKA

Filling the shop
From bottom to top
Stood camel and elephant,
Whistle and top,
Chickens and kittens,
Puppies and cocks,
Motor-cars, steamers,
A wolf and a fox.

Of all that could capture
The heart of a boy,
Andryushka selected
The very best toy.
He picked out a gun,
And the salesman
exclaimed:
“Good lad! Be a hunter,
Sharp-sighted, far-famed!”



OUR PUPPY TUPS

One fine day
We left our pup
All alone
And locked him up.

Not a soul
Remained at home.
Tups was free
To ramp and roam.

He behaved,
Our Master Tups,
Like the naughtiest
Of pups.

First, he tore our doll's
new frock,
Then gave Bunnikins a knock.



Next he went and left our
slippers
On the dresser near the clock.

After that he chased the cat
Round and round about the flat.

On the coal he sat to think
And stood up as black as ink.
In the jug he took a dive—
Scarcely scrambled out alive.
On the bed at last he

clambered,
Piled the pillows in a heap,
Sprawling out across the
blanket
For a sleep...

To the washing bowl we rushed
him,
Scrubbed and dried and combed and
brushed him.

Leave our Tups alone again?
Not for anything! That's
plain.

OUR KITTENS

(A COUNTING-RHYME)

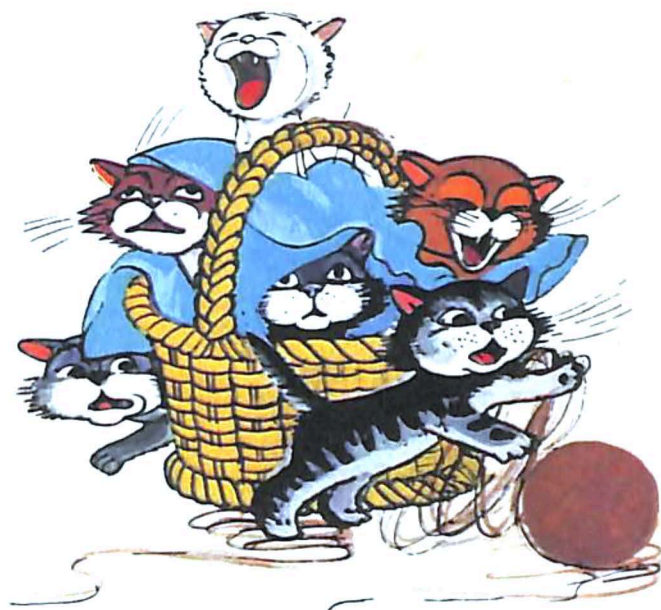
Listen, here's a little story
Which I want to tell to you:
Yesterday our cat had kittens—
Five small kittens—quite a few!

Long we argued how to name them,
Noisy as a troubled hive,
Till at last it was decided
They'd be One, Two, Three, Four,
Five.

One's the whitest,
Two's the tallest,

Three's the brightest,
 Four's the smallest.
 Five is just like Three and Two—
 The same pink nose and whiskers too,
 The same black spot upon his back,
 Sleeping fast from snack to snack.

One, Two, Three and Four and Five—
 The gayest family alive.
 Come and count them on their mat
 Huddled close to Mother Cat.



AT THE BARBER'S

Daddy sat down on a chair:
 "Shave me, please, and cut my hair!"

Barber Tomkin's an old hand:
 Any wish he'll understand.
 Quick, he took a pair of scissors
 From a locker on the wall,
 In a sheet he wrapped up Daddy,
 Chest and back and knees and all.
 Then he stepped behind the chair,
 Snapped his scissors at the air,
 Then, upon the haircut starting,
 With a comb he trimmed the parting:
 From Dad's temples to his crown
 Tufts of hair came falling down.
 Finally, he took a razor,
 On a strap sharpened it up—
 For the razor to shave better
 Mixed some lather in a cup.
 From a sprayer, gaily snorting,
 Sweet Eau de Cologne came spurting.

In a chair right next to Daddy
 Sat a schoolgirl, sobbing sadly.
 How she wailed, the little sissy!
 Tears hung on her nose's tip.
 Tomkin with his shiny scissors
 Cut her pigtail off: snap-snip!
 When you've come to cut your hair,
 Tears won't get you anywhere!

IF

Through the window we sit looking
 At the rainclouds, dense and dark.
 In the garden dogs sit soaking,
 Much too wet to frisk and bark.

Where's the sunshine?
 What's the matter?
 All seems sodden—earth and air.
 In the street there's so much
 water
 That you can't go anywhere.

If you gathered all these puddles,
 Joined them into one big pool,
 Then sat down
 And tried to measure
 Its depth with a wooden rule,
 The pool would turn out to be
 Not much smaller than the sea,
 Though the sea's a wee bit deeper,
 Though its coast's a wee bit steeper.
 If you stuck these clouds
 together—
 Given glue to join them with,
 If you climbed, despite all
 weather,
 On these clouds and found their
 width,
 You'd discover, little friend,
 That the cloud has got no end:
 In Chita it would be snowing,
 While on Moscow showers descend.



A colorful illustration of a young girl in winter attire. She wears a red hat with a blue bow, a blue scarf, a yellow jacket, and a green skirt. She is carrying a large, green, leafy branch over her shoulder. Behind her, a red fox is depicted on skis, holding a bamboo pole. The scene is set in a snowy environment with a small evergreen tree in the background.

He can, but doesn't want to
Look after his own speech;
He has to be translated
For everyone and each!

A NEW YEAR GIFT

To the forest I will go
Where the snow-decked fir trees
grow.

Icicles, each like a gem,
Glitter merrily on them,
Cones from branches dangle brown;
The most handsome I'll chop down.

In the forest, if I come
On a fox, I'll tell her:
"Chum,
Run along, don't bother me,
I'm as busy as a bee!
Not a minute can I stay:
It is New Year's Eve today!"

Then a pack of wolves will meet me
And with angry growls they'll greet
me:

"Stop, young fellow, where's our
tree?"

What's this tree-stump that we
see?"

Then the woodpecker will shout:
"You cut down that tree, no
doubt?"

Bright as silver, stand the trees,
Sunk in snow-drifts to the knees.
Swift, away from bird and
beast

I'll go running on my skis.
Back to school I'll bring my
booty,

Quite the best there's ever
been,

On the branches of my beauty
Scores of candles will be seen;
Hung with paper chains and
crackers,
Flags of different shapes and
colours,

Golden cocks and funny figures,
And a star—just watch it gleam!

Underneath stands Father Frost
On cotton-wool with gold embossed.
It was I who brought the tree!
Come on, watch it, mates, with me!

CLOCKS AND WATCHES

For your clock to tick and chime,
For your watch to show the time,
And for everyone to know
When to come and when to go,
When to start work,
When to stop,
Ivan Petrovich keeps his shop.



Sad old Granny came complaining,
“Dear, I don’t know what to do.
My cuckoo-clock is out of order:
The cuckoo doesn’t say *cuckoo*!”

So the watchmaker, old wizard,
Set to work without a word.
From the tiny carved window
Once again *cuckoo* was heard.

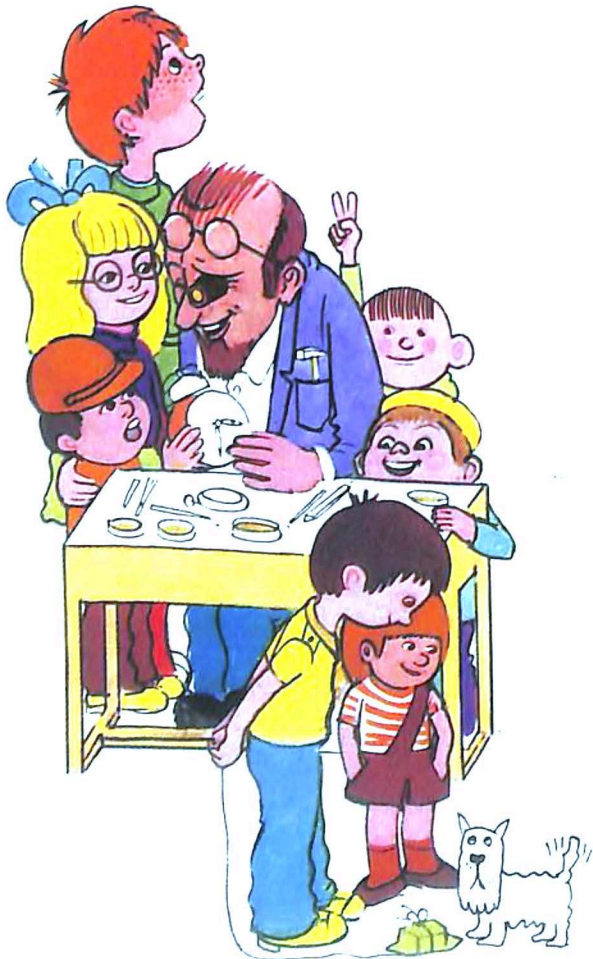
One fine day our ball bounced up
And broke a saucer and a cup.
“Ding!” the clock fell on the floor,
Then stood still and worked no
more.

“Uncle Vanya,” we exclaimed.
“Through the district you are famed.
Won’t you shake our clock awake,
If only for old friendship’s sake?”

Winking under bushy eyebrows—
Everything he understands—
Watchmaker Ivan Petrovich
Takes the clock with careful
hands.

In a jiffy all is ready—
“Tick-Tock-Tick!” sounds clear and
steady.

Now we come to school at eight—
Not too early, not too late.



CYCLING

On two bright wheels
I roll along,
Two pedals turning,
Sure and strong.
I grip the handlebar:
Come on!—
There’s soon a turning—
Now it’s gone.

A road-sign tells me
Clear as clear:
There'll be a gully
Pretty near.
I let my pedals
Twirl at will;
My bike goes skimming
Down the hill.

I fly ahead
On my steel steed.
I've pump and glue
In case of need.

If there's a puncture—
A wee hole—
I'll patch it up
And there—it's whole!
Beside the road

A while I'll sit
And cut out rubber—
Just a bit.

I'll glue it on,
Put things in place
And once again
Full speed, I'll
race.

My pedals spin,
I ride along,
As fast as ever,
Sure and strong.

But then once more
I press the brakes:
Again the road
A left turn takes.

COURAGE, BOYS!

"Vaccination! Everyone
Hurry up and have it done!"

Who's afraid of vaccinations?
Just a little bit of patience;
There are nastier things I've
stood,
And vaccination does you good!

Only sissy-boys and cowards
Have to be egged on and coaxed.
I, though, when I see a syringe,
Shrug my shoulders and crack jokes.

I'm among the first to enter
The doctor's room on the second
floor.



I've got nerves of steel, I'll
tell you,
If you didn't know before.

Here's my arm—now, let them prick
it.

Tell 'em—maybe they've forgot!
Why, I'd swap my football ticket
For a second vaccine-shot.

"Vaccination! Everyone
Hurry up and have it done."
Why, though, can't I leave the
wall?
My knees are shaking, after all!

MY BEST FRIEND AND I

*For Igor Ilyinsky**

My best friend and I, why we,
Live as happy as can be!
We are faithful friends and
true—

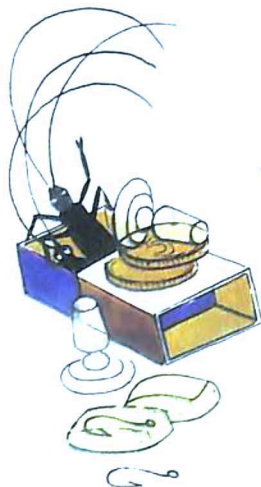
Where he goes,
There I go, too.

And we carry in our pockets
Lots of interesting things:
We've a couple of glass stoppers,
In a match-box, two grasshoppers,
Two big coins, and two brass rings.

Both of us live in one flat
(Anyone can tell you that);
Ring four times, if you want me,
While for him—ring only three.

And we keep two prickly hedgehogs,
Two grass snakes that love to play,
In a cage we have two finches,
Who just sing the livelong day.

* Famous Soviet actor. Mikhalkov's childhood friend.—*Tr.*



And about each snake and bird
And each hedgehog, all have heard,
All the folks on all the floors,
From the first to twenty-third.

My best friend and I each day,
After breakfast, make our way
To our school which isn't far,
Leaving all our doors ajar,

And those pets of ours just stray
Through the neighbours' flats all
day.

Our grass snakes just love to creep
Into draughtsmen's hats to sleep.

Our house-manager, in terror,
Jumped from bed the other night,
When he found two hedgehogs sleeping
Underneath the bed-clothes white.

Our two finches love to sing—
All day long their voices ring;
When our neighbour tunes his
wireless,
He can't hear a single thing.

To the manager, the draughtsmen
Drag the snakes. What can they do?
And they see him with two hedgehogs,
Puzzled by that question, too.

Soon the neighbours all complain,
"When shall we have peace again?"
And the man next door suggests
That the only thing to do,
Is to send those nasty pests,
For safekeeping to the Zoo.

When we came back from the park,
No one met us in the dark;
Sadly we put on the light—
There was not a pet in sight.



Hedgehogs, finches, and grass snakes,
Where, oh where, are you tonight?

My best friend and I, next day,
After breakfast, make our way,
With misgivings, to the Zoo,
Feeling very sad and blue.

All our thoughts have one
refrain:
“Won’t we get them back
again?”

We walk slowly past the cages,
Past the keepers watching there,
While at least a hundred finches
Sing and flutter in the air.

But our finches, which are
they?
Who can tell us, who can say?
And which hedgehog, and which
snake
Is our own without mistake?

For a hundred snakes, or more,
Hiss, and wriggle on the floor;
Of the hedgehogs in the Zoo,
There must be a hundred, too.

But our birds and beasts,
somehow,
Do not recognize us now.
It is near the end of day,
We are asked to go away.

“Let’s go home, this is the
end,”
Very sadly says my friend.
We are faithful friends and
true—

Where he goes,
There I go, too.



DOUBTING FOMA

In one of the houses
That stand in our street
Lived doubting Foma
Whom we often did meet.

Whatever they told him,
At home or at school,
He never believed them,
For that
Was his rule.

“It’s raining, and hailing,
And slushy today,
Put on your galoshes,”
His mother would say.

“I do not believe it.”
And straight down the street
He’d walk through the puddles
With soaking wet feet.

The children are skating,
A frosty wind blows;
And grown-ups are dressed
In their warm, winter clothes.

“It’s cold out,” they tell him;
Foma only snorts,
And goes for a walk
Dressed in nothing but shorts.

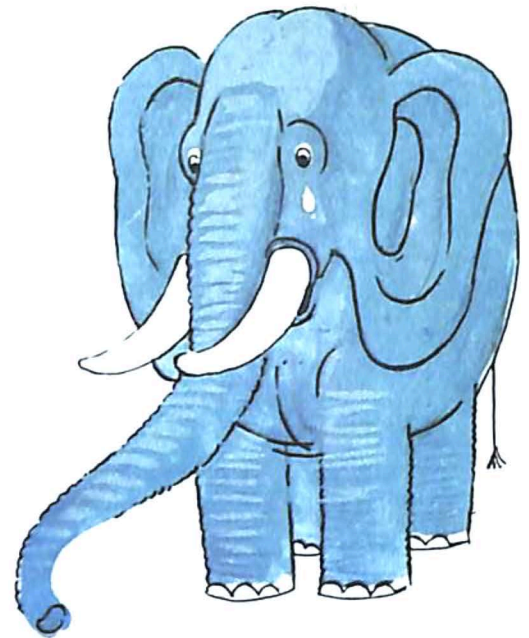
Once, on an excursion
He went to the Zoo.
They told him,
“Now, that is a new kangaroo.”

“I do not believe it,”
He said with an air.
“I think it is simply
An overgrown hare.”



Foma had a dream,
He was far from his home,
In Africa,
Where the wild animals roam.
A smouldering sun
Seemed to hang in the sky,
The wide Congo river
Flowed leisurely by.

His Pioneer friends said,
“Foma,
Oh beware,
Don’t swim,
There are hundreds of crocodiles
there.”



“I do not believe it,”
Said he with a grin,
Undressed, there and then,
And dived recklessly in.



On the sand lie his clothes,
While Foma takes a swim,
In that dangerous river,
That river so grim.

The jaws
Of the crocodile
Drew very near.
“Look out there,
Foma!”
Cried the children
In fear.

Across the wide river
His proud answer
Rolled,
“You needn’t teach ME,
I’m eleven years old.”

The crocodile’s jaws
Were all ready to bite—

He gave a huge gulp,
And the very last sight
The Pioneers had of Foma
Was his head,
And these were the very
Last words that he said:
“I do not believe...”

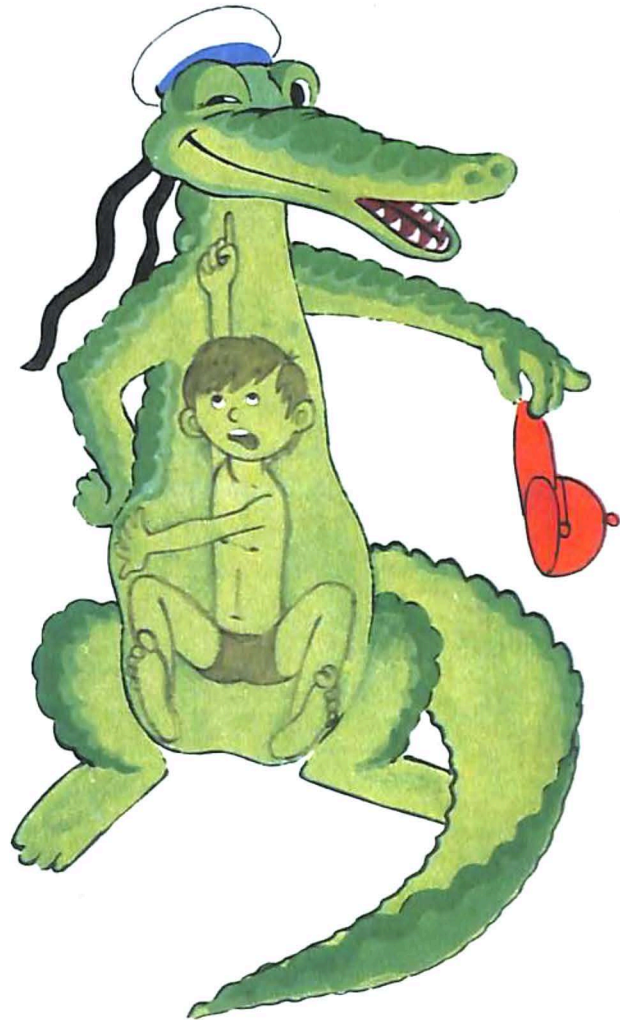
Then the crocodile sighed
And dived out of sight—
He was well satisfied.

On the sand lie his clothes,
But there’s no one to swim,
In that dangerous river,
That river so grim.

And then he woke up,
With a dumbfounded stare,
He reached for his clothes
Which were there on the
chair.

Foma, in surprise,
Simply won’t trust his eyes,
“It wasn’t a dream!”
He indignantly cries.

If you know a doubting
Foma, Nick, or Klim,
I wish you would read
This poem to him.



THE WOODPECKERS

One woodpecker said to another:
“I’ve got a dreadful headache,
brother!

All day I’m pecking at this trunk—
My head spins so, I feel like drunk!
And when a day of work is through
The one result’s an aching neck!
And all in vain! My Goodness! Phew!
Just peck and peck and peck and peck!
I’m sick of pecking for a song!
Now say, what do you think is wrong?”

Then, wordly-wise, replied the other:
“You are to blame yourself, dear
brother!

You’re sick of pecking all in vain?
Now, what’s the big idea!
You’ve got no patience! Use your
brains,

You must have guts, my dear!
If you don’t peck on patiently
You’ll never even catch a flea!”

So one woodpecker told the other
And put some spirit in his
brother.

And now all day again we hear:
“Peck-peck, peck-peck!”
Both far and near.

THE PICTURE



I’ll go and take my pencilbox
And draw a highway. Now
Upon the road I’ll draw a bull
And by its side a cow.

I’ll draw an orchard by the road
And then I’ll draw a shower
To help my chubby apples grow
Bigger every hour.

A cartoon illustration of a boy with red hair and glasses, wearing a yellow shirt and red shorts, sitting on a large sheet of paper. He is holding a blue pencil and a black pencil. The paper has a drawing of a landscape with green trees, a white cow, and a lightning bolt. Various drawing tools like a yellow pencil, a green pencil, a red pencil, and a pair of scissors are scattered around him.

A cartoon illustration of a boy with red hair and glasses, wearing a yellow shirt and red shorts, sitting on a large sheet of paper. He is holding a blue pencil and a black pencil. The paper has a drawing of a landscape with green trees, a white cow, and a lightning bolt. Various drawing tools like a yellow pencil, a green pencil, a red eraser, and a pair of scissors are scattered around him.

My whistle—
A priceless treasure indeed:
Last Sunday I cut it
Myself from a reed.

I spent half a day
Manufacturing it.
My knife and myself
Had to sweat quite
a bit.

One day at the seaside
I swam near the beach:
A stone on the bottom
Lay just within reach.

Though everyone told me
I took it in vain,
The stone is a beauty—
That's perfectly plain.

Yet out of the
playthings
So dear to my soul,
My sharp iron chisel
I prize above all.

A grey-haired old
carpenter
Gave it to me.
He smoked a big pipe
As he worked heartily.



THE CIRCUS

AT THE ENTRANCE

What is that?
Don't you know?
It's the circus!
In we go!

Lots of merriment and fun—
Come and see it, everyone!
Noise and laughter fill the hall;
Nowhere
For a pin to fall!

Doormen say to me and Dad:
"Third row, please! Come on, young lad!"
Each of us knows where he sits:
My seat's fifth, and Daddy's—sixth.

THE TIGHT-ROPE WALKER

The brave lad smiles and strolls along:
He won't trip up—not one step wrong!
The danger's great with which he's
dealing:

The rope runs right beneath the ceiling...
Along the rope he will proceed
As smoothly as on Gorky Street.
The tight rope stretches, never slack.
He strolls, bold fellow, there and back.

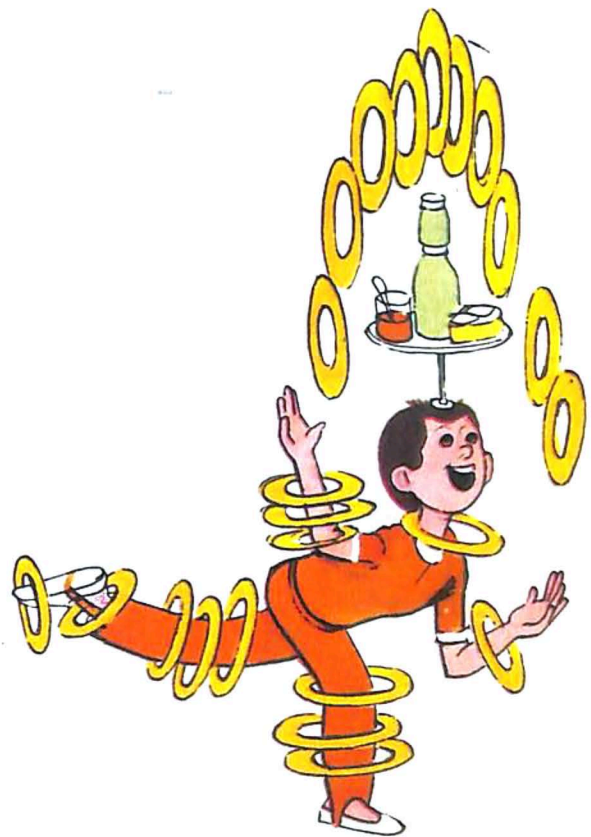
THE JUGGLER

The juggler we see is a wonderful man:
He tosses his rings up as fast as he can.
He tosses them up and then catches
the rings;

Well-earned are the claps which his
cleverness brings.

In stormy applause all the audience
burst,

For here's where hard labour and
talent come first!



THE BARE-BACK RIDER

The horseman smiles, and I smile
back:
A fine and fearless man, indeed.
It's bare-back rider Ali-Beck
Approaching on his russet steed.

He gallops, standing in his stirrups,
His flapping cape behind him flies;
With gun in hand,

With shining dagger—
No coward to that name replies!

At first his charger picks up speed;
Each other seven shots succeed.
Then Ali-Beck in full career
Makes his true horse stop short and rear.
The gunshots thunder in our ear,
But neither I nor Father fear.

THE CONJUROR

An easy trick:
The lock goes click.
The box is empty—nothing in it.
Now shut the lock
And watch the clock—
Let it stay closed for just a minute.
Now turn it over:
Look in there—
Nothing inside except pure air.

But then the box is opened wide;
Fast wings come flapping from inside.
Then somebody begins to bark,
And from the box, empty and dark,
Come doves in flocks,
Two turkey-cocks,
A dog, a rabbit and a cat,
A boy in a bright-coloured hat.
I wonder where they could have sat,
All in a box as small as that?



FLYING ACROBATS

These flying acrobats you see
Are the Petrovs—"The Fearless
Three".

In the circus very seldom
Do these acrobats appear.

One!—Petrov flies skyward. Well
done!

Two—Petrov has caught him. Cheers!
Three! About to jump head downwards
Stands, so beautiful and bold,
Zoya Pavlovna Petrova
Only seventeen years old.

Then again towards the ceiling
Brother after brother climbs.
Cheer the troupe!
Tomorrow evening
Off to Leningrad it flies.

TRAINED POODLES

Seven actors stand before us:
Seven poodles sing in chorus.

On their hind-paws, in white spats,
Showing off their stylish hats,
Tripping up
And loudly yelping,
Through the act
Each other helping.

Polkan's a pupil to be praised,
He's very diligent and able:
In just one school-year he has
learned

The whole multiplication table.

The biggest figures can Polkan
Add or subtract at will.
Who wants to get along in life
Had better study well!

BEARS

Bruin got a bike to ride on.
Watch him! What a clever beast!



For five minutes, never tiring,
He will ride around at least.

Here are brothers Jack and Jock;
On trapezes see them rock.

Jacky, though he wants to eat,
Is afraid to leave his seat.
Jocky'd run off to a wood:
He'd climb higher there, he would!

LIONS

Every day on the arena
With his lions to perform
Marches Ivanov the tamer
In a captain's uniform.

On a lion he goes riding;
With a whip he teases him.
Leo growls, yet follows orders,
Tame, although his looks *are* grim.

Ivanov has learned their habits:
Studied them five years and more.
So he puts his left hand calmly
Right into the lion's maw.

Then he kisses him and hugs him,
Takes the beast by both its ears,
While the thrilled spectators,
Burst into tumultuous cheers.

The end.
It's time to set off home.
Rain showers from the heavens' dome.
Although we're soaked through as
We've both enjoyed the circus show.



AUTOGRAPHS

Two girls, a hobby once
selecting,
Took to autograph-collecting.

Their collection now contains
Quite a lot of well-known names.

Two big albums, which they
treasure,
Have already signed by now
Actors, athletes, football-
players
And a poet of renown.

How to get an autograph
Our two friends know well
enough.

Stamp-collecting, in their
eyes,
Is a pastime to despise.

Badge-collector, as a
rule,
Is the synonym of fool.

Our two girl friends burst
with fervour,
And, their purpose best to
further,
Try to get into the way
Of the heroes of the day.

Then, on having caught their
eyes
They attack them with loud
cries,
Yelling both at the same time,
“Sign our album, do please sign!”

Someone signed in such a hurry
That they can’t make out his
flourish:



One of the selected few,
But they can't remember who.

Someone scribbled with a ball-pen
All across the album page;
Chess or hockey champion, was he,
Or a shaker of the stage?

If you ask for what and why
They are famous, by the by,
Our two friends who run whole days
Dazed with their collecting craze,
For their life can not reply!

THE RUNAWAY

There was a dog called Nelly,
A paragon of grace—
She had a coat so curly,
And such a winsome face!



Her lady just adored her
And kept her in good care
And in a little basket
Would take her everywhere.

And often from that basket
Among the beet and kale
Two fluffy ears would waggle
And one cut, fluffy tail.

The lady trimmed and bathed her
And checked how much she'd weigh.
Beyond all sense and reason
She petted her all day.

She bought a lead of leather
To take her for a stroll,
And for a pretty dog-coat
She cut up her best shawl.

She went off to the market
Fresh meat for her to get.
And at the same time daily
She fed her little pet.

So Nelly lived in clover
And all she knew was that
She shouldn't play with strange dogs,
Nor chase an unknown cat.

The lady and her Nelly
Would go to breathe fresh air,
Attracting the attention
Of people everywhere.

“My goodness, what a darling!
Just look—it’s pocket-size!”
“Where could we buy or get one
So wonderfully nice?”

“What breed is it, your
doggy,
How old is it, please say?”
“Is it her natural colour,
That lovely bluish-grey?”

To all the countless questions
The lady gave reply;
But Nelly impolitely
Would growl at passers-by.

When anyone attempted
To stroke her with a hand
She tried to bite them, so as
To make them understand:

She never would have dealings
With people of their kind.
And so she shook all over
And barked and growled and
whined.

✿ ✿ ✿

I don't know how it happened
And who it was to blame,
But all alone our Nelly
Into the street once came.



42

“Whoever finds my doggy
I shall reward for it.”

But nobody responded,
Nor fell on Nelly's trace.
No news was there about her,
Though weeks went by apace.

She lived as she could manage,
Unkept, unwashed, uncombed;
Our long-lost little Nelly,
Without a care she roamed.

Among her like—a sampling
Of homeless, lawless strays,
She altered absolutely
Her onetime haughty ways.

Not barking as she used to
Till passers-by turned pale,
She'd stand upon the sidewalk
And wag her little tail.

A boy would munch a biscuit,
While Nelly waited, quiet:
Perhaps if she were lucky,
She too might get a bite.

With nobody to spoil her
Nor pet, nor pat, nor kiss,
Surprisingly, our Nelly
Her lady did not miss.

She never had for dinner
Such titbits as before,
And yet she had companions
And jolly friends galore.

Although it sometimes came to
A quarrel or a fight,
The homeless strays were faithful
To one another quite.



They'd roam through yards
and gardens
And after cats they'd chase;
Today they're here—tomorrow
In some far-distant place.

Together with them Nelly
Spent nights just anywhere,
And lived like other mongrels
Without a worldly care.

Yet every dog, however
It might be fine to roam,
Must finally start dreaming
About a decent home.

Not just a golden prison
But home, where friendship's prized,
And loyalty and service;
Where treachery's despised.

They'd think about it always,
Every homeless stray,
When on their paws cold noses
At nightfall they would lay.

But as our little Nelly
At her own will left home,
She didn't have that feeling
And still preferred to roam.

* * *

The lady sighed for Nelly
And searched both high and
low
And never got a new dog—
She loved her Nelly so.

I too remember Nelly
And think about her, though
What happened to her
further
I really do not know.



THE DULLARD

“Children who have talent
Aren’t like you, my dunce;
They take part in concerts,
Act and sing and dance.

“Drawings on such subjects
As Peace and Labour go
Into print in journals
And are put on show.

“Many get the chance to
Travel round the world
To compete in contests
Other countries hold.

“Lisichkina Natasha
Was rewarded once;
Your friend Garik also—
Not like you, my dunce.

“Only hopeless dullards
Never meet success!”
So says my own mother.
My own mother, no less.

Well, I never answer,
Only bite my lips.
Arguing about it
Isn’t worth fried chips.

Let those other children
Move on to success,
Sing and draw fine pictures,
Dance in fancy dress.

Let them play their fiddles,
Act in films and plays—
People may be useful
In a lot of ways.

Who I’ll be in future
I know well: one day

I'll go on a journey
Very far away.

And with other team-mates,
Nowadays my friends,
We will build a railway
To the country's ends.

Trains towards the ocean
Whistling, will ride,
Of her son my mother
Soon will think with pride.

Mother was unfair then,
Putting me to shame.
Builders just like fiddlers
Have a claim to fame.

UNFULFILLED DREAMS

A thing I always dreamed about
When I was eight years old
Was that a little bicycle
Into my room be rolled.

From dawn to dusk I'd ride about
Upon my bicycle, no doubt!

It hurt me till I almost cried
When Father would say "No!
A bicycle you want to ride?
You'll come to grief, I know!"

I longed in winter for a sleigh
And saw it in my dreams,
But when I woke, I knew they'd say:
"Oh no, forget it, please!"

"My boy, you want to break your head?"
Was all my mother ever said.

I wished to have a little pup,
But was advised to sit



And do my homework or read books
And never think of it.

“No, sonny boy, don’t play the fool!”
They’d say, and pack me off to school.

I seldom heard the nice word “Yes”
But didn’t dare object.
And all the presents I would get
Were not what I’d expect.

A scarf, a brand-new overcoat,
Or music lotto, say,
But all of them were not the thing
I dreamed of day by day.

How sad that grown-ups often don’t
See eye-to-eye with us!
For childhood, as they say themselves,
Can happen only once.

THE FINCH

I longed to have a bird-pet
And put some money by,
And then went to the market
A little finch to buy.

My finch sat in its wire cage
And pecked its daily food
And sang its song as if it
Were living in a wood.

My mates who came to see
me
Would watch the finch a bit,
And each and every wanted
To have one just like it.

I fussed and busied with it
Though I’d enough to do,
But in two weeks the singer
Had bored me through and
through.



One morning to the country
I went off for three days,
And all that time I left it
Uncared for in its cage.

I came back from the country
When I had stayed enough,
And there the famished
creature
Lay in its empty trough.

From death I saved the
warbler:
Soon on its feet it stood;
I set it free and watched it
Fly to its native wood.

My friends planned for my birthday
To give a pup to me,
I said, "I'm not yet ready."
And so they let me be.

REAL FRIENDS

Little Michael looks so sad:
Michael stutters, poor young
lad!

Michael cannot speak like
others
With a clear pronunciation,
And to listen while he stutters
Really takes a lot of patience.

Michael suffers worst pronouncing
Words beginning with a "K",
But he has real friends around him;
No one laughs—they only say:

"It's unfortunate, we know, but
Take example from the rest:
Make an effort, boy, be bolder—
Speak and get it off your
chest!"

THE PICNIC

Once we went off to the country
For a Sunday in the air.
Not a spot was there left
empty
By the river anywhere.

Here they sat and there they lay,
Children chattering at play,
Grown-ups singing, blithe and gay,
Eating, sunbathing all day.

Walking up the bank, we found
Just a spot of vacant ground.

But upon the sunlit grass
Strewn with bits of broken
glass,
Empty cans lay everywhere;
We just groaned in sheer despair.

On we went again and found
Another spot of vacant ground.

Yet here too they'd been before us,
People on a holiday,
Burning paper in the forest—
Mucked it up and went away.

Well, of course, we passed it by.
“Hey!” at last came Dima's cry,
“That's our place, now—just the thing:
Lovely view, and here's a spring;
Splendid beach, and there's a stack—
Now then, fellows, let's unpack!”

Then we had all sorts of fun,
Swam, lit fires, lay in the sun,
Spreading paper on the grass,
Ate canned fish, drank tea and kvass;
Singing, on the bank we lay,
Had a rest, and ... went away!



And there stayed beside the water
Near the river, on the grass
Two tin cans, two broken bottles,
Two uneaten, soggy breadrolls
And a puddle of spilled kvass.

Someone else came to the river
For a Monday in the air:
Not a single clean spot was there
By the river anywhere.

THIRTY-SIX AND FIVE*

Once again I'm hale and live!
I have thirty-six and five!

Frowning, spiritless and gloomy,
At the instrument I stare:
Where's my temperature, blast it?
Why's my forehead not aflame?
Why am I not very ill
With at least a little chill?

Yes, again I'm hale and live—
Only thirty-six and five!

I touch my stomach—doesn't ache.
I try to sneeze—no sound I make.
Not a cough! And on the whole,
A healthy look, upon my soul!

So tomorrow—ain't it fine?
I must be at school by nine,
Sit there until lunch, poor thing,
Read and write and even sing!
Yes, and stand before the board—
Mute, till everyone's stone-bored.

Ah, again I'm hale and live—
Only thirty-six and five!

* The temperature of a healthy person in centigrade.—Tr.

Fine—it's thirty-seven and
two—
I'm already giddy! Phew!
Cheeks all flushed (with shame,
you'll guess)—
"You're unwell, poor darling?"
"Yes!"

HATEFUL SLEEP

No, I don't argue, I don't
glare,
Just sit and drink my tea.
I do not hurry anywhere;
I finish when I finish—
there!



MAGIC TABLETS

When we're in a poor condition
We need drugs and a physician.

In a drugstore, full of light,
Glass and marble glitter bright.
In glass cases stand in order—
Bottles, phials, jars and pots
Filled with different pills and
powders,

Ointments,
medicines
and drops;

Cures for whooping-cough and quinsy
And for freckles on the face,
Then cod liver oil and quinine—
Vitamins, of course, beginning
With A—
each in their own place.

Here's an ointment—smelly, greasy—
Used against mosquito-bite.
There's a drug for influenza;
Swallow it—and you're all right!

Corns are cured with sticky plaster;
Medicines from herbs are made,
To be used for aches and ailments
In the stomach and the head.

There are medicines for headache,
Yet a doctor can't be asked:
"Give me pills to be less lazy
When I've been assigned a task!"

Let it be invented quicker—
Not for any ache or pain,
But that lazybones should take it.
And be fond of work again!

Boys and girls who in their
records
Signs of laziness display—

Let them take a pair of tablets
Three or four times every day.

Should such drugs be in supply,
Two whole packages I'd buy!
No, not only two, but three—
They'd be handy, you'll agree!

SCHOOL

It was a long, long time ago.
I, too, for the first time
To school one morning had to go
With other chums of mine.

There, by the blackboard, too,
I stood
And got a sum to do.
With chalk in hand, as best
I could,
White figures there I drew.

But now those years have flown away,
Their traces disappear.
Yet sometimes I still meet today
My friends of yesteryear.

One drives a tank, one sails at sea,
The third's an engineer.
The fourth—an eye-physician's he;
The fifth—a land-surveyor.
The sixth's a captain in the North,
The seventh writes on art;
The eighth works on the radio,
The ninth's myself—a bard.

Each time I meet them we discuss
Those years at school so dear:
I couldn't show the Caucasus,
And you, friend, the Crimea...

Remember how I prompted once?
I won't forget it ever—

I said five eights are sixty—
dunce!—
And Elbrus is a river.

We won't be children any more,
We're all grown-ups today.
School opened up for us life's door
And showed us each our way.

But seeing children off ourselves
As a parental duty,
We each remember every time
Our youth—its joy and beauty,

Our class, its windows, and our school
Which by a river stood...
You'd never find in all the world
Another one so good.

NEW YEAR'S EVE

On New Year's Eve, as people say,
Whatever's wished by you,
Will all be granted one fine day
And by all means come true.

And even little children may
Have every wish fulfilled.
The only thing you need, they say,
Is just to be firm-willed.

Just don't be lazy, study well
And show your perseverance,
And do not think that school is hell
In fact, if not appearance.

On New Year's Eve, so people say,
Whatever's wished by you,
Will all be granted one fine day
And by all means come true.

So let this be our common wish—
It's not too much to ask:



Let pupils get the highest marks
For every single task.

Yes, let our children study so,
Employing every minute,
That not one pupil's record-book
Should have a poor mark in it.

THE FIR-TREE

A fir-tree stood knee-deep in
snow,
The greenest, finest in its row,
Straight, slender,
Bright with resin-drops,
Two metres tall from foot
to top.

A very serious event
Once happened to the fir:
Some people came to chop
her down,
Or so it seemed to her.

They knocked a peg into the
ground
To notice where she grew,
And only in the evening dark
The frightened fir came to.

How strange to feel so young
and new.
Her fear had vanished quite.
Gay lanterns, all of different
hue,
Upon her boughs shone bright.

With gold and silver chains
decked out,
The pretty fir-tree stood,
And nonetheless, beyond all
doubt,
She still was in the wood!



No, not chopped down! Alive
and hale,
Admired by everyone.
Who saved and dressed her up
so gay?
The forester's young son.

THE FIND

I ran from home into the street
And turned around the corner,
And on the pavement there I
found
A purse, upon my honour!

Four small compartments had the purse,
A lot it seemed to weigh;
In every section copper coins
Inside, packed closely, lay.

And suddenly, down that same street
Which to the market led,
Towards me walked
A little girl
With sadly drooping head.

In grief, she looked beneath her feet
As if upon her way
Somewhere a most important thing
Upon the pavement lay.

Poor little girl, she didn't know
That in my hand clenched tight
Her copper wealth, her heavy purse
Lay hidden from her sight.

But then I too stopped in my tracks
And shuddered with dismay,
For in my pocket I could not
Find the knife I took that day.

Four sharp-edged blades that penknife
had

Of cunning workmanship,
A pair of scissors folded neat,
A cork-screw with sharp tip.

And suddenly I saw the girl
Lift up those eyes of hers:
She held the knife in her small
hand
And asked me: "Is it yours?"

I took the knife assuredly
And pocketed it—so!
The little girl walked on
again
And nothing did she know,

But sadly looked beneath her
feet
As if upon her way
Somewhere a most important
thing
Upon the pavement lay.

Poor little girl, she didn't
know
That in my hand clenched tight
Her copper wealth, her heavy
purse
Lay hidden from her sight.

I dashed along after the girl
And caught her up, of course,
And then I asked the little
girl,
"I say, isn't this yours?"

"Yes, mine," the girl said, "yes, it's
mine.

I am so absent-minded!
Please let me have it. So I thought
That somebody would find it."



THE CRYSTAL VASE

Three schoolgirls on a summer day
Went searching through the city.
From store to store
They went, before
They chose this vase so pretty.
The one they found
Was nice and round,
Of lovely glass—the best
Of all the crystal vases
That caught their searching gazes,
This vase they found
So nice and round
Outvalled all the rest.



First Zina, flushed with pleasure,
Took up the long-sought treasure;
The next turn was Tamara's,
Who carried it as far as
The boulevard; Varvara
With awkward fingers took
The parcel from Tamara.
And then—Oh lasses, look!
Around them, in a misty haze,
Spin trees and sky and grass;
And many-coloured sunbeams blaze
From bits of broken glass.
In sore distress, our schoolgirls three
Stood sobbing in the road,
Until a tall militiaman
Towards our schoolgirls strode.
“Now tell me what’s the matter?”
“It’s shatt— it’s shatt— it’s
shattered!”

Three broken-hearted schoolgirls
Stood sobbing in the square,
Till crowds of anxious people
Flocked round from everywhere.

“What’s happened?—what’s the matter?”
“It’s shatt— it’s shatt— it’s shattered!”
“Do tell us what’s the matter?”

"What's happened, anyway?"
"They say that something's shattered,
Some kind of glass, they say."
"Oh, no,—not glass," replied they,
"It was a present," cried they,
"A vase—a loving token.
A present from our class.
We bought a vase—a token,
We bought it—and it's broken,
And now, we have no money,
Nor vase of crystal glass."
"So, so," the people uttered,
And then, a driver muttered:
"Those bits won't stick together
Whatever glue you try!
And really, it's a pity,
It must have been so pretty..."
And then a champion boxer
Looked on and heaved a sigh.

That same big shop where vases
Attract admiring gazes
Is full to overflowing,
And folk of every kind
And rank are here, I'll wager—
From Soviet Air Force Major
To famous Donbas miner—
With but one aim in mind.

Before the sparkling counter where
They sell such dainty things
As crystal, glass, and chinaware,
A hot discussion rings.

"That cut one, please—that vase, I
mean."

"No, let us have the one that's green!"

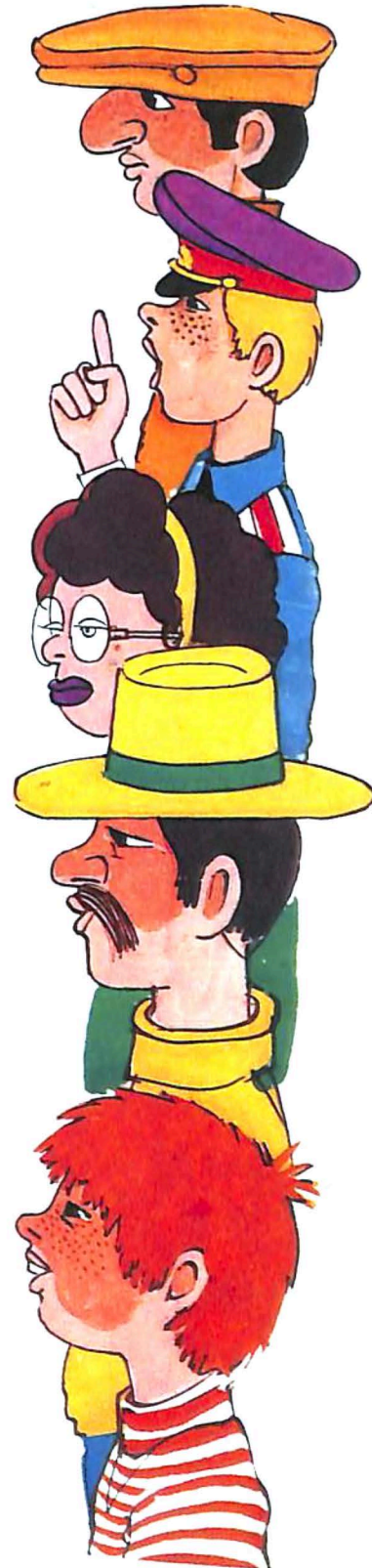
"But what about this red one,
friends?"

I think it's best of all."

"No, that one standing nearer,
The one whose glass is clearer!"

"But look—it seems to me, my
friends,

A little bit too small!"



The driver thinks the vase of
green
The loveliest he's ever seen.
The Major likes the azure vase,
Transparent as the sky.
"But I'd choose this, if you ask
me,

No other prettier can be,"
Politely to the Major
The boxer made reply.
Three little fifth-class
schoolgirls
Can't sit a moment calm,
For fear the lorry, moving fast,
Might do their treasure harm.
Their friend, the tall militiaman,
Soon gave their lorry way,
And nodded to the schoolgirls,
As if to say "Good day".
Three schoolgirls gripped each other's
hands

With terror in their gaze,
For there, beside the driver,
stands
Their precious gift—the vase.

"Oh, driver—please don't
hurry!"

The girls cried in a flurry,
Tap-rapping at the window
Behind the driver's head.
But he replied with laughter:
"Don't worry—I'll look after
This vase of yours, my lasses;
I'm not like you," he said.

It is an afternoon in May—
A modest teacher will this day
Be sixty years of age; her work
Has won her love and fame;
To her, in the assembly hall—
Before the teachers, pupils, all—
Three girls will bring a priceless
gift—
From whom, and in whose name?

An auction had begun on stage
Where families were torn apart.
The clang of chains and cries and groans
That sounded there could break one's heart.

“Who’ll offer more?
He’s sold! The next!
Nigger, stand up, you’re not at home!”
And forward, staggering, Tom stepped.

“Who’ll offer more?” “My money’s spent.”
 “No offers?” “Here’s another dime!”
 “No more?” A bracelet someone sent.
 “Here, take this silver brooch of mine!”

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Meanwhile, the audience in rage
Looks from the darkness at this
scene.

“No more? One!.. Anyone more? Two...”
All of a sudden on the stage
Whispering something heard by few,
A girl ran out, ten years of age.

“Planters” and “Negroes” gave her way;
The actor-auctioneer froze still
When for Tom’s liberty to pay
She held out her five-ruble bill.

Then, waiting wordlessly, she stood;
It was a moment, great and stunning,
When, rising against Evil, Good
Is far more powerful than money.

And all the mighty Soviet Land
Through which the hall’s warm breathing
ran,

And all the mighty Soviet Land
Was there, behind her, like one man.

A BOY AND GIRL MADE FRIENDS

There were two friends—a girl and lad.
Her friendship made him proud and
glad.

And like a comrade, like a chum,
A good friend, he would come
When it was dark, to see her home,
Then went back home alone.

Together they would often go
A football match to see,
And never did he think of her
As of a fiancée.

But Dad and Mum, a backward pair,
Would say about him so:

“Just look—our Tanya’s caught a
lad—
They’ll marry soon, you know.”

Their neighbours, opening the door,
Would grin at him and tease:
“You’ve come to see your love? She’s
out!
So come tomorrow, please!”

At school—yes, even at their
school
They sometimes heard the cry:
“Where are you looking, Komsomol?
That friendship—my-o-my!”

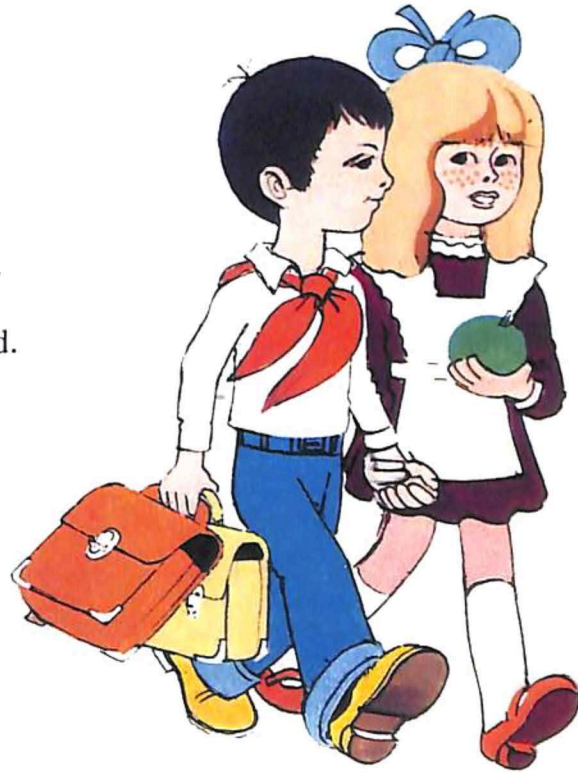
Each time together they appeared
They’d hear, “Ha-ha! He-he!
Our Ivanov is off his chump—
He’s marriage-minded, see?”

There were two friends—a girl and
lad.
Her friendship made him proud and
glad.

He never meant to fall in love
And never knew till then
That he would by some silly
fool
Be nicknamed “lady’s man”.

Aboveboard, honest, frank and
pure,
Their friendship gave them pride.
What happened next, we know for
sure:
From gossipers it died.

They killed it with their silly
jokes,
Sly chuckles and remarks—
The would-be wit of cacklers
Who hunt for prey like sharks.



CLOUDS

Curly clouds,
Whirly clouds,
Flying single and in crowds—
Through the sunny height you
roll,

Whole
Or with a ragged hole,
Weightless,
Lighter than the air,
Borne by brèezes everywhere...
On a grassy glade I lie
Looking at you in the sky,
Looking with a jealous eye:
Why is it I cannot fly
Like the clouds so high above,
I, the writer Mikhalkov?

Yet how splendid it would be
For an earthly thing like me
If, the moment I'd espy
Silver cloudlets sailing by,
At a single hearty stride
I'd be sailing by their side!

They're no aeroplane for you,
Flying only "from" and "to"
Moscow, say, or Erevan.
Without schedule, without plan,
Clouds to any country can
Fly unhampered—just like that,
Over rough terrain and flat,
Higher, lower—makes no
difference...

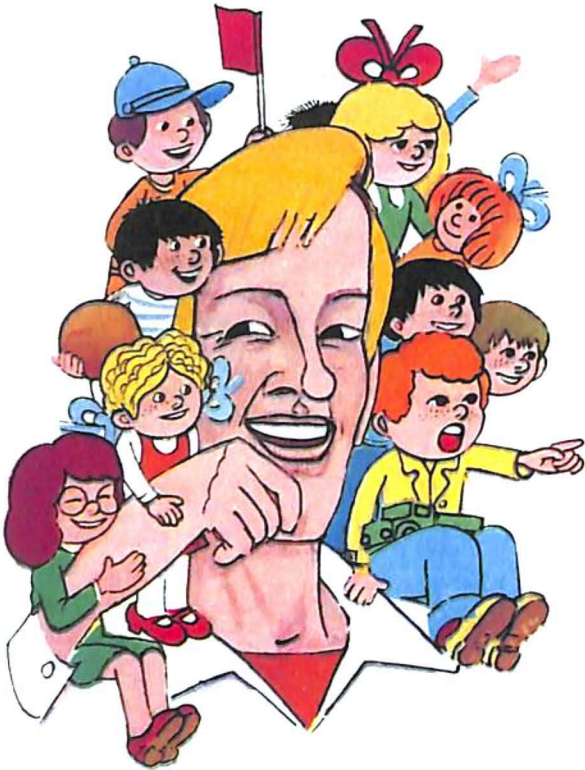
In the darkness without lights
They can cover any distance,
See the most exciting sights.

Say, a cloud decides one
morning
To survey Vladivostok.
So it takes off without
warning,
Without looking at the clock!

A cartoon illustration of a man with glasses, wearing a yellow shirt and blue trousers, lying on his back on a grassy field with daisies. He is smoking a pipe and has an open book and a pencil next to him.

When at last a suit he'd buy,
Which had struck his fancy's eye,
One quick turn before the mirror—
And apart the seams would fly.





Over any fence or wall
He could peep, he was so tall;
Dogs would loudly bark in warning,
Thinking thieves had come to call.

At his mealtimes he would eat
Double portions, as a rule;
And at night he'd stretch his feet
From the bed on to a stool.

When he'd go to see the pictures,
He'd be told by quite a few,
"Sit upon the floor, young fellow,
It is all the same to you!"

When to stadiums went he,
They would let him enter free,
For they thought that Uncle Steeple
Surely must a champion be.

And the neighbours, near and far,
Every grown-up, every kid,
All could tell you where he lived,
Where he worked, and what he did.

For when kites would catch and dangle,
High above, from wires or trees,
Who but he could disentangle
Them so quickly, with such ease?

And the very smallest fry
At parades he lifted high,
Because everyone must see
When our troops go marching by.

All about loved Uncle Steeple,
All were fond of Uncle Steeple,
For he was the friend of children,
Of the kids in every yard.

When towards his home he strolled,
"Greetings!" shouted young and old;
When he sneezed they'd shout in chorus,
"Uncle Steeple, don't catch cold!"

Very early Steeple rises,
Opens all his windows wide,
Does his daily exercises,
Takes a shower in his stride.
Not to brush his teeth each
morning
Is a thing he can't abide. ♣

Someone's riding on an ass,
Feet a-ploughing through the grass;
Why, that someone's Uncle Steeple;
People stare, as he rides past.

And they all shout to Stepan:
"Try a camel, little man!"

So a camel Steeple tried;
People laughed, until they cried.
Someone made a clever crack,
"You will break the camel's back!
Camels, friend, will never do,
Elephants were made for you!"

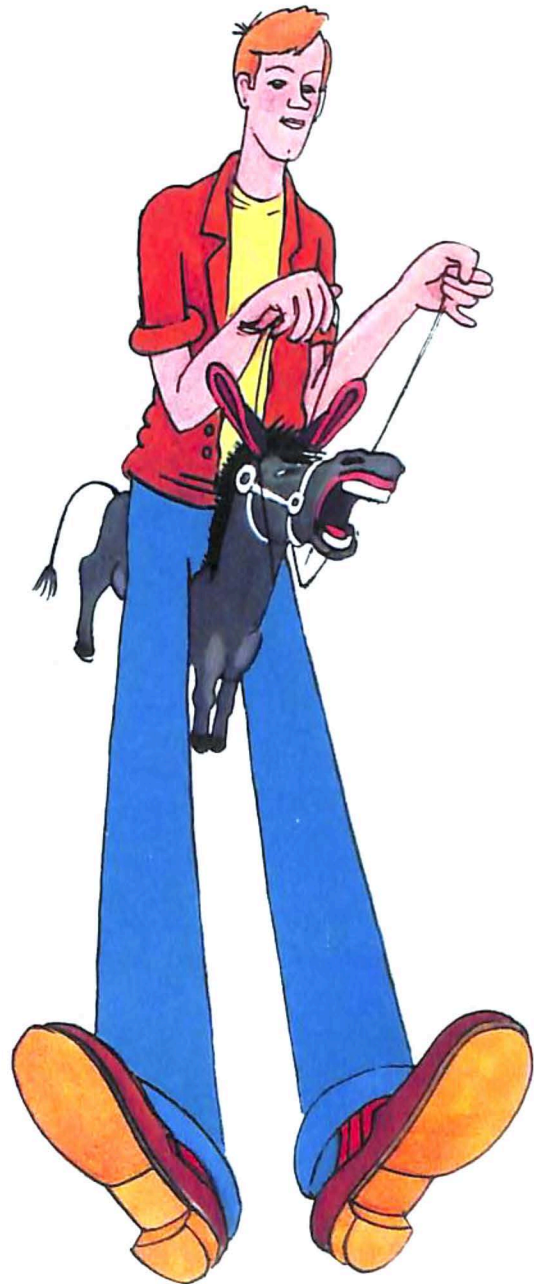
On the tower Steeple's waiting
For his turn to take a jump,
He is slightly hesitating,
And his heart goes thump, thump,
thump:

While below him laugh the people,
"See the Steeple on a steeple!"

Into shooting-galleries,
Uncle Steeple'd barely squeeze;
To the keeper he would say,
"Let me shoot at targets, please."

But the puzzled man would stand
And, with twinkling eye, demand,
“Surely, you don’t need to *shoot* them.
You can *reach* them with your hand.”

In the park, this Saturday,
'Twill be very bright and gay;
There'll be music all night long,
Dancing, 'laughter, merry song.



At the entrance Steeple asks,
 “Will you, please, show me some
 masks?”

I want one that will disguise me,
So that none will recognize me.”

“What’s the use?” they say in jest,
 “Even though you do your best,
 Anyone will recognize you:
 You’re much taller than the rest.”

What's the matter? Why the tumult?—
 "Schoolboy's drowning!" people shout.
 "He has fallen in the river,
 Hurry up and pull him out!"

While the people stood about,
Uncle Steeple got him out.

“This is perfectly fantastic,”
All the people shout with glee.
“See, the water in the middle
Doesn’t reach above his knee!”

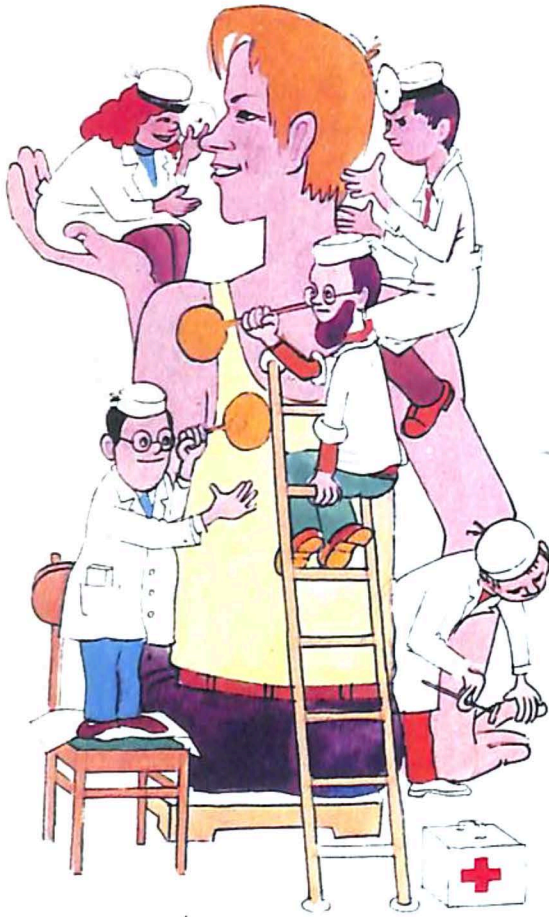
Frightened, wet, but safe and
sound,
Stands the schoolboy on the ground;
Uncle Steeple saved the schoolboy,
Saved a boy who might have
drowned.

All the people, for his deed,
Wish to shake him by the hand;

“Ask for anything you need,”
He is made to understand.
“I don’t need a single thing,”
Answers Steeple, colouring.

Whistling loud, the engine sped,
While the driver stared ahead;
As they thundered past a station,
To the fireman he said:

When he opened up the shutter,
From the window, small and
narrow,



Flew the pigeons, all a-flutter—
Eighteen pigeons and—a sparrow.

Grateful children highly praise him,
For he set the pigeons free,
And the grown-ups all advise him
That a fireman he should be.

“I don’t want to be a fireman,”
Was his answer to them all.
“I would rather join the Navy—
If I do not prove too tall.”

In the corridor there’s laughter,
Jokes, and merry conversation.
In the doctor’s office Steeple
Strips for his examination.

Say the doctors, all in chorus,
“Reaching you is hard to do.
You are quite a problem for us:
We aren’t half as tall as you.”

“We’ll examine,” said the doctors,
“Both your hearing and your sight.
Is your liver quite in order?
Are your heart and lungs all
right?”

They examined him and weighed
him,
And he passed in every test;
And they said: “Your heart beats
soundly

And your lungs are of the best.
Pretty tall, we must confess,
But we’ll pass you none the
less.

“As a tankman you won’t do,
Tanks are far too small for
you.

As an infantryman? No,
From the trenches you would
show.

No one knew him anymore.
Children asked him, by the door,
“Who may you be looking for?”

Uncle Steeple turned their way,
And saluted, bright and gay,
As he told the happy children,
“I’ve come home on leave today.

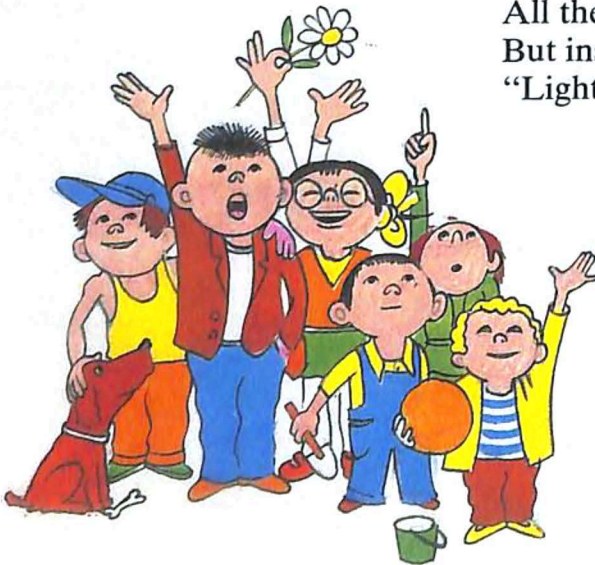
“Haven’t slept the night, what’s
more,
Walking seems so hard on shore.

“Let me change, and rest my
feet,
Have some tea, a cup or two,
Then come in, and you I’ll treat
To some tales about the blue.

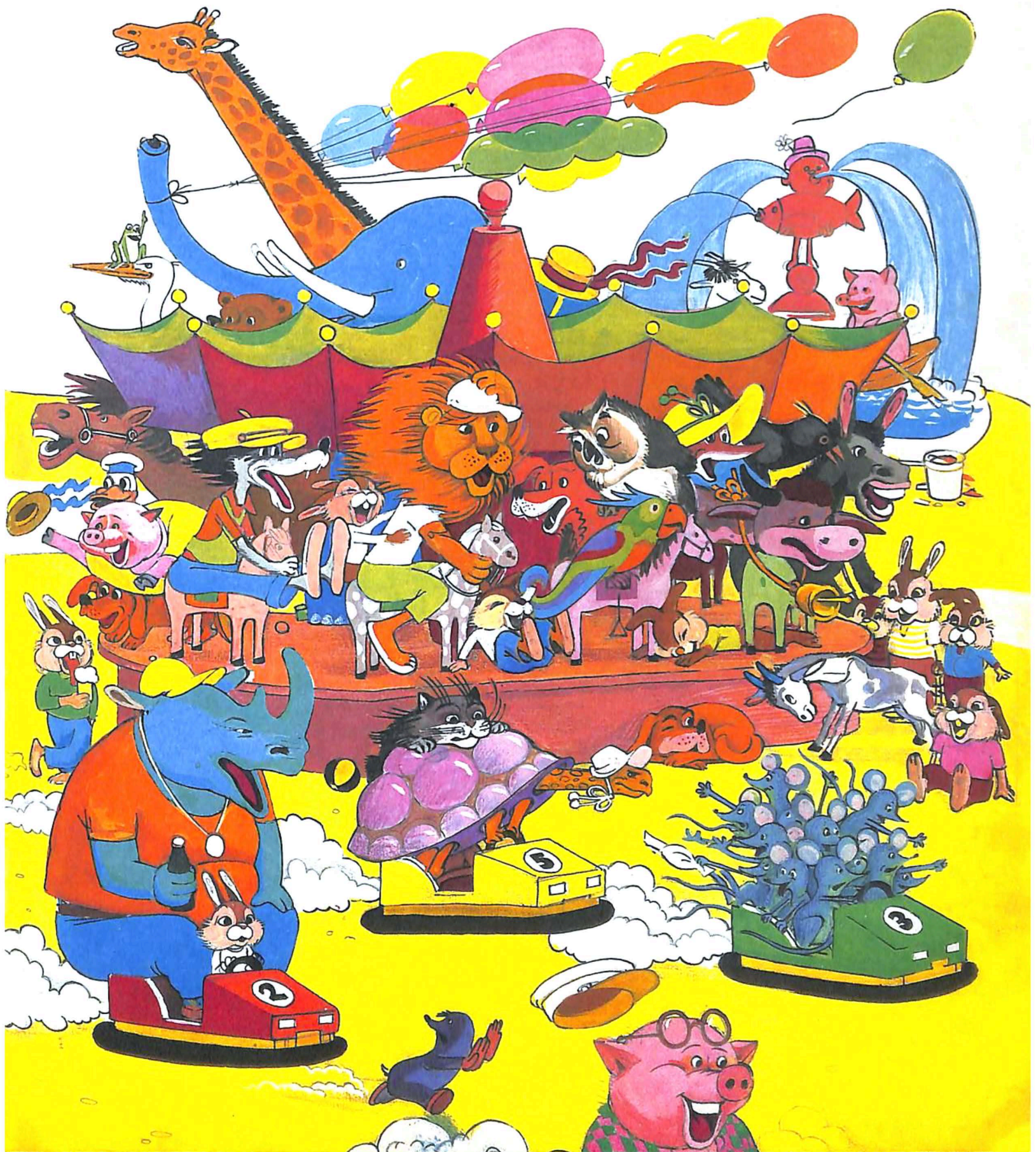
“About war, the cannonade,
And the Leningrad blockade,
How, when serving on the cruiser,
I was wounded in a raid.”

Prouder children you won’t meet
Than the children of our street—
For their friend’s a Soviet sailor,
Serving in the Baltic Fleet.

When they see Stepanov coming,
All the little kids run out,
But instead of “Uncle Steeple”,
“Lighthouse” is the name they shout.



fables in prose



THE NUISANCE

He was an awfully bothersome Kid with tiny horns.

He never had anything to do, so he just went around bothering everyone:

"I love butting! Come on, let's have a butting match!"

"Leave me alone," said the Turkey-Cock, and stepped aside with a very important look.

"Listen, let's butt!" the Kid urged the Piglet.

"Don't bother me!" said the Piglet, and dug his little snout into the earth.

Then the Kid ran up to an old Sheep.

"Let's butt!"

"Go away and leave me alone!" said the Sheep. "It wouldn't be proper for me to butt anyone."

"Why not, if I can! Come on, let's have a butting match!"

The Sheep said nothing, just went away to avoid trouble.

Finally, the Kid caught sight of a Puppy.

"Hey you, let's butt!"

"Come on!" the Puppy said willingly, and gave the Kid a painful bite in the leg.

"Wait a minute," the Kid whimpered. "I wanted to butt, and what are you doing?"

"And I want to bite!" said the Puppy and bit the little Kid once more.

THE CONCEITED CAT

A Cat once heard somewhere that the Tiger and the Panther belonged to her own Cat Family.

"O-ho!" said the Cat with delight. "And I, silly thing, never knew what relatives I had! Now I'll show them!"

Without more ado, she jumped on a Donkey's back.

"What's all this, now?" said the Donkey in surprise.

"Take me where I tell you to. Get on with it and don't talk back. Do you know who my relatives are?" cried the Cat from her seat on the Donkey's back.

"Who?" enquired the Donkey.

"The Tiger and the Panther, that's who! If you don't believe me, ask the Raven."

So the Donkey went and asked the Raven, who confirmed it.



"Yes, indeed, the Cat, the Tiger, the Snow-Leopard, the Bobcat, the Panther and the Jaguar, and even the Lion all belong to the Cat Family."

"Now do you believe me?" cried the Cat, sinking its claws into the Donkey's neck. "Trot for me!"

"Where to?" asked the Donkey coolly. "To the Tiger or to the Panther?"

"Oh, no-o-o!" the Cat miaowed suddenly. "Take me to those ... take me to the m-m-mice!"

So the Donkey took the Cat to a place where mice lived. For after all is said and done, a Cat is nothing but a Cat.



THE HARE AND HIS REFLEXES

A Hare saw a Tiger lying fast asleep, with a big Snake curled up beside him.

"Oh dear! What if he stings the Tiger? Let me wake him up," decided the Hare, and, although shivering with fright, he gave the Tiger's tail a hearty yank.

"Who has dared to wake me up?" roared the Tiger.

"I beg your pardon, sir, I did!" lisped the Hare. "To warn you about that Snake beside you!"

The Tiger looked round, saw the Snake, and sprang away.

"Give me your paw," the Tiger told the Hare. "You are a brave, noble fellow. From now on, we will be friends, and I will always protect you. Now you needn't fear anyone."

The Hare was overjoyed.

But all of a sudden a Fox jumped out of the bushes, and the Hare disappeared the same instant as if by magic.

The Tiger shook his head in surprise.

Towards evening, however, he sought out the Hare.

"Why did you run away?"

"I saw a Fox."

"But wasn't I there? Didn't I promise to protect you?"

"Yes, you did."

"Don't you believe me, then?"

"I do."

"Maybe you think the Fox is stronger than me?"

"No, of course, not."

"Then why did you run away?"

"A conditioned reflex," the Hare blushing confessed.

THE DONKEY AND THE BEAVER

In the middle of a forest glade there once grew a fine young tree.

One day a Donkey came running through the glade, but, as he was looking the other way, he bumped right into the tree, and so hard that he saw stars.

The Donkey got very angry. He went off to the river and called out to a Beaver whom he knew:

"I say, Beaver, do you know that glade in the forest with a tree in the middle of it?"

"Of course I do!"

"Then do me a favour—go and fell that tree—you've got such sharp teeth!"

"But what on earth for?"

"I bumped my head against it. Look at this bump— isn't it huge?"

"Where were your eyes?"

"Where, where! I was looking elsewhere. Please go and cut down that tree!"

"I wouldn't like to. It looks so fine in the glade."

"But it gets in my way. Cut it down for me, Beaver!"

"No, I won't."

"What's the matter: too hard for you?"

"No, but I won't do what you ask anyway."

"Why not?"

"Because if I did, you would bump into the stump."

"Then dig up the stump."

"If I do, you will fall into the pit and break your legs."

"Why should I?"

"Because you're a Donkey!" said the Beaver.

THE HIKERS

The Fox, the Beaver and the Boar decided to go on a hike—to roam over hills and forests and see the world.

They set off as soon as they were ready and they walked and they walked until they came to a river. There was a bridge over it, however, but it was too narrow for all three of them to use at once, so they had to cross it one by one.

"You go first," the Boar told the Beaver. "You're the oldest—the honour should be yours."

"That's right! Let Beaver go first!" agreed the Fox.

So the Beaver went on. But suddenly the bridge gave way beneath him and the Beaver fell into the water.

"Help, help!" screamed the Fox. "Jump into the water, Boar—save Beaver! Our poor Beaver's drowning! Quick, Boar, swim after him!"

“Swim after him yourself!” said the Boar with a snort. “I’d be glad to, but I’m afraid of catching cold in the icy water.”

“Thank you, my friends, but I think I can manage by myself,” the Beaver’s voice suddenly came from under the bridge. “You know, I can swim.”

The Beaver clambered out on to the bank, coughed and shook the water out of his coat.

“That’s wonderful,” said the Fox and the Boar joyfully. “Now let’s go on.”

“Oh no,” said the Beaver. “With friends like you, I don’t need enemies.”

IT WAS ALL THEIR OWN FAULT

Hare and his wife built themselves a small house in the forest. They cleared the ground, swept the walk and all that was left for them to do was to move a big rock from the path.

“Let’s push it together and roll it off the path,” Hare’s wife said.

“Why bother?” said Hare. “Let it lie there. If it’s in anyone’s way they can walk around it.”

And so the rock remained where it was near their front steps.

One day Hare was hopping home from the garden and forgot all about the rock on the path. He stumbled over it, fell and hit his nose.

“Let’s move the rock,” his wife said again. “See how you’ve hurt yourself!”

“So what!” Hare said. “It’s not worth the trouble.”

Soon after, Hare’s wife was carrying a pot of hot soup to their outdoor table. She looked at Hare, who was banging his spoon on the table impatiently, forgot all about the rock, tripped over it, spilled the soup and burned herself. That rock was really no end of trouble!

“Let’s move that old rock, Hare!” she pleaded. “Before you know it, someone will crack his head on it.”

“Let it lie where it is!” the stubborn Hare replied.

Then Hare and his wife invited their old friend Misha Bear to dinner.

“Yes, I’ll be glad to come,” Bear said when they asked him over. “You bake a cake and I’ll bring some honey.”

When the hares saw him coming they went out on the porch to meet their guest. Misha was hurrying along, pressing a keg of honey to his chest with both paws. He was not looking at the path.



Hare and his wife shouted and waved:

"The rock! Watch out for the rock!"

Bear could not understand what they were shouting and waving about, and before he knew it, he had tripped over the rock. He was going so fast he did a somersault and came crashing down against Hare's house.

The keg broke and the house came tumbling down around him.

Bear groaned at the sight of it all. The hares both wept.

But what was the sense of weeping? It was all their own fault!

WHY MICE DON'T HURT CATS

Once upon a time long, long ago, a little Mouse came home very late one night and told the other Mice:

"I just bumped right into the neighbour's Cat!"

"Well," the Mice all squeaked in excitement, "go on. Tell us what happened next?"

"We bumped into each other head on," the little Mouse continued, "and, well..."

"How dreadful! Go on, what happened next?" the Mice asked impatiently.

"You see," sighed the little Mouse with a dreamy look, "it was such a night!.. Clouds running across the sky ... stars shining ... a beautiful moon ... a warm breeze ... I felt so wonderful, I was in such a lovely mood, that..."

"Well? What happened? Tell us quickly!"

"...that I didn't even touch the Cat at all. Live and let live!.." the little Mouse concluded his story.

"Dear, dear, how touching!" squeaked the Mice. "We too will never hurt Cats—never in our lives!"

And that is why Mice, ever since that time, long, long ago, have never ever hurt Cats.

THE TEST

"I know how to talk like people!" Parrot boasted. "I can't stand bird language! You won't ever hear another word from me in bird language!"

"My, my!" the blue Jays chirped. "Isn't he smart! He'll only speak people's language from now on! He hates bird language!"

"Did you say he can talk like people?" old Crow asked. "That's not bad at all. But that doesn't mean he's smarter than anyone else. I know a couple of

words people use, but I don't say I'm smarter than everyone else."

"Talk to him in people's language," the Jays said. "He won't talk to you in bird language, that's for sure. Then you can see for yourself."

"That's a good idea," Crow said and flew over to the branch on which the proud Parrot sat.

"How do you do!" Crow said as clearly as a human being. "How do you do! I'm Crow!"

"Parrot's a fool! Parrot's a fool!" Parrot answered proudly.

"Did you hear him?" the Jays chirped excitedly. "Now do you believe him?"

"Yes, I do! And what's more, I agree with him!" Crow said.



THE STORKS AND THE FROGS

A Frog was arguing with a Stork about which of them was the handsomer.

"I'm far handsomer than you," said the Stork confidently. "Just look what fine legs I've got!"

"But I've got four of them to your two!" retorted the Frog.

"Yes, I admit I've only got two legs," said the Stork, "but they're far longer than yours!"

"But I can croak and you can't!"

"Yes, but I can fly, and you can only jump."

"You can fly, but you can't dive!"

"So what? I've got a beak!"

"Pah! What good's a beak!"

"Here, I'll show you!" the Stork lost his temper and swallowed the Frog.

No wonder people say that Storks swallow Frogs so as not to waste time arguing with them.

A BIT TOO MUCH

Once upon a time there was a Wolf who lived alone in his den. Never in his life had he cleaned or repaired it. It looked so old and dirty, that it seemed it might fall apart at any moment.

One day an Elephant walked past the Wolf's den and gave the roof a tiny bump. That was enough, though, to make the whole den lopsided.

"Oh dear! Please forgive me, my friend!" the Elephant said to the Wolf. "I didn't do it on purpose. I'll mend it for you right now."

The Elephant was a jack-of-all-trades and by no means work-shy. So he took a hammer and nails and put the roof right again. It looked even better than before.

"O-ho," thought the Wolf, "it seems Elephant's afraid of me. First he asks me to forgive him and then he mends my roof. Let's have him build me a new house. If he's afraid of me, he ought to obey!"

"Hold on, hold on!" he shouted at the Elephant. "What's the idea? Do you think you can get off as lightly as that? You nearly knocked the roof off my house, then nailed it back on any old how, and now you get away? Be so kind as to build me a new house! And don't just stand there or I'll teach you a lesson you'll never forget!"

The Elephant said nothing: he just calmly picked the Wolf up by his middle and flung him into a hole full of stinking water. Then he sat down on the Wolf's den.

"Here's your new house for you!" said the Elephant and walked away.

"I don't understand a thing," said the astounded Wolf, slowly regaining his senses. "First he's afraid of me, begs my pardon, then he goes and does that! No, really, I don't understand!"

"You silly fool," croaked an old Raven who had seen every thing. "You just don't know the difference between cowardice and good breeding!"



HOW THE BOA CONSTRICTOR CHOKED

A little Mouse was sitting on a stone when a greedy Boa crawled by and spotted him.

"He'll do for a snack!" said the Boa, and, opening his jaws, struck at the Mouse. The Mouse, however, leapt aside just in time. The Boa swallowed the stone instead and it got stuck in his greedy Boa's throat. What was he to do?

The Boa thought a bit and crawled off to the Heron.

"Help me, old bird!"

"What's the matter? Overeaten again?"

"I've swallowed a stone instead of a Mouse," he said. "And it's stuck in my throat."

"Try shaking your head," suggested the Heron.

"I've tried!"

"Then try and cough it out!"

"I've tried that too. No good!"

"No good?" echoed the Heron.

"No good!" croaked the Boa.

"That's jolly good!" said the Heron.

THE LAST WISH

A Wolf decided to hang himself and moaned and groaned about it to all the animals in the forest.

"Oh, yes! Just watch the Wolf hanging himself!" sneered the Hare.

"He will, he will! Most certainly! He's really made up his mind," said the Tortoise.

"Perhaps, he'll change it?" asked the Hedgehog, and rolled himself into a frightened ball.

"Oh no, he won't! He's even chosen the tree! And the branch too!" chattered the Magpie. "He's going to hang himself on an aspen. And now he's looking for a rope!"

The forest was alive with gossip and rumours.

Some believed the news, others didn't.

Finally it reached old Towzer, the village watchdog. He ran to the forest and found the Wolf. Old Grey-Coat was sitting beneath the aspen, sad as sad can be, and looking up at the branch which he had chosen. Old Towzer's kind heart missed a beat. Although there was no love lost between them. Towzer never let the Wolf anywhere near the farms. But this was a real drama—real tragedy!

"Hullo, Grey-Coat!" Towzer greeted him quietly.

"Hullo and good-bye!" replied the Wolf, shaking a tear from his nose. "Good-bye, old Towzer! Remember me, will you? Don't be too hard on me!"



"Can all those rumours be true?" asked Towzer cautiously. "I simply couldn't believe my ears! Why? What's happened!"

"I've been disgraced! Put to shame in every fable and fairy tale. I don't want to live any more. Please help me find a rope. Take a look in the old shed. It's locked, but you're allowed to go in, old boy, people trust you...."

"All right, all right," Towzer agreed unthinkingly.

"Thanks awfully," said the Wolf, deeply touched. "And also, if you don't mind, bring a goat-kid along with the rope. That's my last wish. Do please fulfil it!"

So kind-hearted Towzer went and fulfilled the Wolf's last wish.

But old Grey-Coat didn't hang himself—he changed his mind.

FAVOURS

The Elk was tired one day of roaming through the woods, and wanted to have a rest. He lay down in a glade and asked the Hare:

"Do me a favour: wake me up in half an hour."

The Hare got very full of himself: just fancy, the Elk had asked him for a favour.

"Sleep, sleep! Of course I'll wake you!"

The Elk stretched out and closed his eyes.

"Perhaps you'd like some hay strewn under you?" asked the Hare. And he fetched a whisp of hay and put it under the Elk's side.

"Thanks, but I don't need it," said the Elk who was already half asleep.

"What do you mean, you don't need it? You'll feel more comfortable!"

"All right, all right!.. I just want to sleep!"

"Perhaps you'd like a drink of water before you doze off? There's a brook not far away. I can be back in no time!"

"No, no, I don't want any. I just want to sleep."

"Sleep, sleep! But perhaps you'd like me to tell you a fairy tale? It would help you fall asleep," the busy Hare offered him another favour.

"No thank you, no! I'm falling asleep anyway!"

"Perhaps your horns are getting in your way?"

But at that moment the Elk jumped to his feet and yawning, wandered off.

"Where are you off to?" wondered the Hare. "You haven't even slept for twenty minutes yet!"

THE BAD OMEN

Once upon a time there was a Black Cat—black as black can be. The Cat was a good hunter—one day she would catch a mouse, the other a fish. One morning she was coming home from a successful hunt, when she met a Puppy.

“Cat, Cat, take me hunting with you!”



“All right,” agreed the Cat. “Two’s company.”

“Right,” said the Pup, “only let me run ahead, so you don’t cross my path, or we won’t have luck: after all, you’re a cat, aren’t you, and a black one, too!”

“In that case, I won’t take you anywhere,” answered the Cat.

“Why?” asked the Puppy.

“Better lose with Clever than find with Fool. And you’re an utter fool, that’s clear!” said the Cat, and went her way.

THE PUPPY AND THE SNAKE

A Puppy quarrelled with his old friends and ran off to make new ones. In the forest a Snake crawled out from beneath a rotten stump and coiled itself up. When the Puppy came up to it, the Snake stared into his eyes.

“Well now,” said the Puppy, “you’re a real friend: you just look at me and keep quiet. At home all they do is grumble, growl and bark at me. Everybody keeps lecturing me and bossing me about—old Towzer, Bobby and even Spot. I’m sick and tired of them!”

The Puppy went on complaining, while the Snake just stared and said nothing.

“Will you be my friend?” asked the Puppy, jumping off the treestump on which he had been sitting.

The Snake uncoiled itself and bit the Puppy.

Silently. To death.

THE MIRROR

There was once a mean Hippopotamus who liked to tease.

"Hunchback!" he shouted to Camel.

"Who's hunchback? Me?" Camel said indignantly. "Why, if I had three humps I'd be that much more beautiful!"

"Hey, Fatty!" he shouted at Elephant. "Which end is front and which end is back? They both look the same!"

"I wonder what's bothering him," good-natured Elephant said to himself. "I like my trunk. And it doesn't look a bit like my tail."

"Beanpole!" he laughed at Giraffe.

"You're the one who looks funny," Giraffe said, looking down on Hippopotamus from above. "Why don't you have a look at yourself?"

The animals found a mirror and went off in search of Hippopotamus. He was teasing Ostrich at the time, saying:

"Hey, you plucked thing! Naked knees! You're supposed to be a bird, but you can't even fly!"

Ostrich felt so unhappy he stuck his head in the sand.

"Listen, you," Camel said, coming closer. "Do you think you're such a beauty?"

"Certainly," Hippopotamus replied. "Can there be any doubt about it?"

"Well then, have a good look at yourself!" And Elephant handed him the mirror.

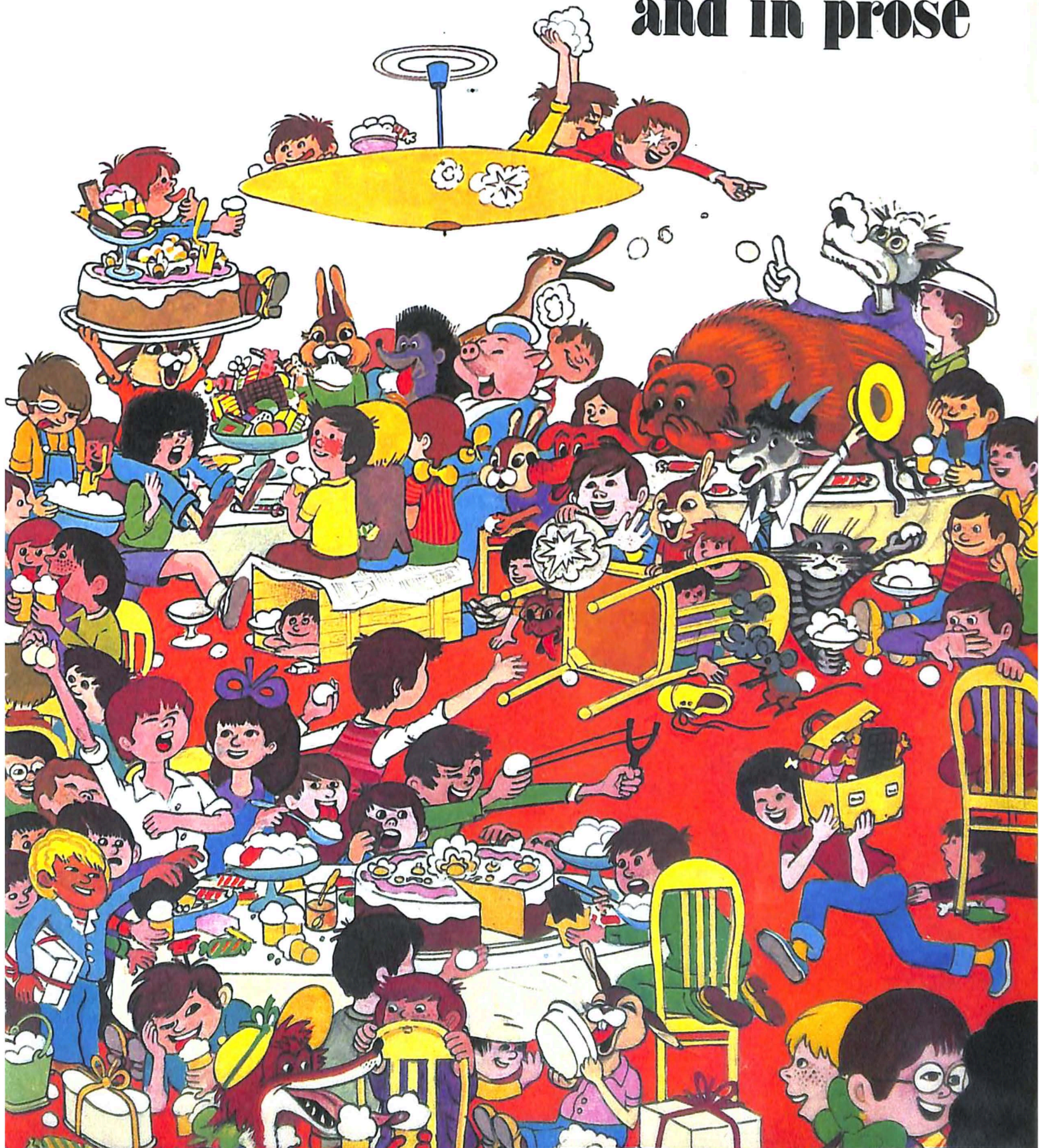
Hippopotamus looked into the mirror and began to laugh.

"Ha-ha-ha! Ho-ho-ho! Who's that ugly thing?"

As he was looking at himself in the mirror and laughing away, Elephant, Giraffe, Camel and Ostrich suddenly realised that Hippopotamus was really as dumb as could be. From that day on they stopped paying attention to his taunts.



fairy tales in rhyme and in prose



THE GRATEFUL HARE

(A BASHKIRIAN TALE)

A peasant told his wife one day:
“Today my dear’s a holiday.
So let us have a jolly feast
And call our nearest kin, at least:
Grandad and Grandma and in-laws,
Brothers and sisters too, of course,
Their children too, and have good cheer.
Run off, son, call our kinsfolk here.”

But Ishbulat was wont to hear
Not quite what he was told, poor dear,
And, running fast as he was able,
Called half the village to the table.
And so to mark the holiday
Grandma and Grandad came that day,
Brother and sister, pal and chum.
No, nobody forgot to come:
Both Kadyrgul and Saranbai,
Both Khalima and Yuldibai,
Their nextdoor neighbour Salavat,
Kugui and Aminbek—all sat
Around the table—an amount
Too big for anyone to count.

Then somehow, every guest took seat
And heartily began to eat.
And then in less than half a minute
The cake and all the stuffing in it,
The mutton and the *bishbarmak*
All vanished without trace or track.
“Ah me!” the Mother groaned aloud.
“What else is there to give the crowd?
I thought we’d have just kinsfolk here,
But half the district’s come, I fear.”
The father said, “Go, ask your son:
Hear what he says, the guilty one.”

The guilty one himself felt sad:
Deep in the woods cried Ishbulat;
He sat there sobbing on a stump,



When suddenly out of a clump
Of bullrushes appeared a Hare.
“My good friend, don’t sit sulking
there.”

But Ishbulat cried all the more—
His tears in streams began to pour.
“Don’t cry,” the Hare exclaimed again,
“I know you are the one to blame.
But once last winter,” then said he,
“From certain death you rescued me,
And I will pay you back in kind
Because you have a heart so kind.
Now go back home and tears don’t spill.
All will be well—you’ll see it will.”

Home from the woods came Ishbulat,
And there the countless guests still
sat:
Grandad and Grandma as they’d come,
Sister and brother, pal and chum,
Both Kadyrgul and Saranbai,
Both Khalima and Yuldibai,
Their nextdoor neighbour Salavat,
Kugui and Aminbek—all sat
Around the table, an amount
Too huge for anyone to count.

Here Mother asked, “What shall we do?”
They’ll stop respecting me and you!”
“It’s long we hadn’t such a feast,”
Sighed Father, “seven years at least!”
But then he looked into the yard
And suddenly stood staring hard.
Then Mother, too, froze still as death
And all the guests, too, caught their breath.

Bears from the woods came in a throng:
Whole honeycombs they brought along.

Then wolves, too, followed in a throng:
Great mutton-chops they brought along.

And then came foxes in a throng:
Chickens and geese they lugged along.



And then the deer came in a throng:
Sweet milk in pails they took along.

Squirrels and rabbits in a throng
Mushrooms and berries fetched along.

And field-mice too came in a throng:
Gold wheat in sacks they hauled along.

Three days and nights the folk made merry
And feasted. Did they like it? Very!

I too was there and had my share
And sat beside the Grateful Hare.

GREEDY VARTAN

(AN ARMENIAN TALE)

A peasant called Vartan once brought
A sheepskin to his neighbour,
“Now, could you make a cap of this,
Or is it too much labour?”

“Why not?” examining the hide,
Exclaimed the willing man.
“And what if I should order two?”
Again inquired Vartan.

“I’ll make you two,” “And three?” “Well,
yes!”

“And even four?” “All right.”
“And what of five?” “Let it be five,
If so you wish, I might.”

“Then surely you could sew me six!”
“If need be I shall try.”
“Then let’s say seven,” cried Vartan.
“Good!” came the prompt reply.

When in a day the client came
To try his purchase on,
The furrier laid all seven caps
His working bench upon.



“Good gracious, did I order these?”
Vartan in fury roared.
“When sewing them you must have been
As tipsy as a lord!

“There’s nothing left for me to do
But throw them out, I swear!
I ordered seven lambskin caps,
But now have none to wear!”

“Cool down, my friend, and blame
yourself,”
The furrier replied,
“How could I make seven big caps
Out of a single hide?”

FROST AND FROSTY

(A LITHUANIAN TALE)

Grandad Frost once had a grandson—
Frosty—hearty, hail and handsome,
Sharp of tongue and keen of wit,
But he liked to boast a bit.
“Grandad’s mighty, but I’m mightier,
And it hurts more when I bite ye.
Aren’t I handsome? Aren’t I nice?
All the world I’ll turn to ice!”

Once our Frosty ventured out
Late at night to frisk about
And he saw: in fur coat clad,
Fat and drunk, a landlord sat,
Driven homeward on a sleigh.
Frosty jumped up straightaway,
Dropped beside him on the seat,
Pinched his nose and numbed his feet.
Soon the landlord’s nose turned white,
Legs all stiff with Frosty’s bite,
Bits of ice fly from his eyes:
Sure as sure, the landlord dies.
Naught can save him—neither furs,
Nor his mittens, nor his purse.

“What are you so proud of, Frosty?”
Grandad Frost the lad accosted.
In reply his grandson sneered:
“All there’s left of him’s the
beard!

He could hardly draw a breath
When I’d frozen him to death!
You are mighty, yet I’m mightier,
And it hurts more when I bite ye.
All the world I’ll turn to ice!”
“All right, Grandson,” Frost replies,
“Take a rest, lad, for a minute,
See that wood—the peasant in it?”
“Where is he?” “There, in that copse—
Faggots in the wind he chops.”
Frosty flew there without stopping,
Guided by the sound of chopping.
There he saw a skinny bloke
Scarcely covered by his coat
Chopping faggots for his stove
In the windy, frosty grove.

“Now then, Grandson,” Grandad
chuckled,
“Isn’t he too tough to tackle?”
Frosty cried: “Give me a dozen—
In a jiffy they’ll be frozen.”
Through the forest Frosty swept
And beneath his collar crept,
Poked him cruelly in the ribs,
Bit his nose and ears and lips;
Frosty swore and Frosty blew,
Chilled the peasant through and
through.

But the peasant chopped away—
Not a weakling, I must say.
Waving heartily his axe,
In the wilderness he hacks.
Getting tired, he only sighs,
Brushes sweat-drops from his
eyes,

On a treestump sits awhile:
“What a heat!” he’ll only smile.

In another hour or two—
Time at work like lightning
flew—

In his belt the peasant stuck
His big axe and spat for luck,
Hale and hearty, on his sleigh
Piled the wood and drove away.

Meanwhile Frosty in the dumps
Sauntered home through twilit
clumps.

“Grandson Frosty, why so sad?”
Grandad Frost now asked the lad.
Frosty’s sorrowful account
I’ve no time now to recount,
Only ever since that day
When a peasant on a sleigh
Comes for firewood, Frosty loses
All his cheek and quietly snoozes.





A FRIEND IN NEED

Big Bear bullied a small Hare, and all for nothing: he just caught him and boxed his ears. One of Hare's ears even stayed crooked.

Poor Hare cried and cried. His ears finally stopped hurting and his tears dried, but still, he felt hurt. What had he done? Why, he might bump into Bear again at any time! His ears would never last that way! But whom could he go to for help? Bear was the strongest animal in the forest. Wolf and Fox were his very best friends, they would always stick up for Bear.

"Who can help me?" Hare sighed.

"I can!" someone squeaked.

Hare cocked his left eye and saw Mosquito.

"How can you help?" he said. "What can you do to Bear? He's so big and you're so tiny. You're not strong enough."

"Wait and see!" Mosquito said.

Bear had been tramping through the hot forest all day. He was sleepy and tired and lay down in a raspberry patch to rest. But the moment he closed his eyes he heard something droning near his ear: "Zz-ii-nng!"

Bear knew that was Mosquito's song. He held his breath and waited for Mosquito to land on his nose. Mosquito circled round and round and finally did land on the very tip of Bear's nose. Bear swung with his left paw. It came down smack on his own nose! That would teach Mosquito a lesson!

Bear turned over on his right side, closed his eyes and was just in the middle of a yawn when he heard something droning near his ear again: "Zz-ii-nng!"

Mosquito must have got away that time!

Bear held his breath and lay still, pretending he was asleep, but all the while he was listening and waiting for Mosquito to find a new landing place.

Mosquito droned on and on and then suddenly stopped.

"Good riddance!" Bear said to himself and stretched. But Mosquito had landed softly on Bear's ear and had crawled inside. How he bit him! Bear jumped up. He swung with his right paw and it came crashing down on his ear so hard that he saw stars. That would take care of Mosquito once and for all!

Bear scratched his ear and settled down comfortably. He would be able to sleep now! But the moment he closed his eyes he heard that same old "Zz-ii-nng!"

Not again! What a pest!

Bear grumbled, got up and headed away from the place where Mosquito had trapped him. He stumbled along, crashing through the bushes, yawning so

hard his jaw cracked, nearly falling asleep on his feet, but Mosquito was right there beside him: "Zz-ii-nng!"

Bear began to run. He kept running until he was so tired he collapsed under a bush. He lay there, breathing hard, keeping his ears pricked for Mosquito.

It was very still in the forest. And pitch dark. All the birds and beasts were snoring away happily. Bear alone was awake, almost fainting from exhaustion.

"What a fix!" Bear said to himself. "That stupid Mosquito has me tied up in knots till I don't even know my own name any more. I'm glad I managed to escape. Now I can get some sleep at last."

Bear climbed under a large hazel bush. He closed his eyes and dozed off. He began to dream. There he was, in the forest, when all of a sudden he caught sight of a beehive. It was full of honey. He was just going to stick his paw into the hive when he heard something go: "Zz-ii-nng!"

Mosquito had caught up with him and had awakened him after all!

Bear sat up and groaned. Meanwhile, Mosquito kept flying round his head in circles, now closer, now farther away, droning louder, then softer, until he suddenly stopped altogether. Had Mosquito vanished?

Bear waited a while, then he crawled farther into the bush and closed his eyes. He was just dozing off contentedly when Mosquito struck up his song: "Zz-ii-nng!"

Bear crawled out from under the bush. He began to cry.

"What do you want, you old bug? I hope you drop dead! Just you wait! I don't care if I don't sleep a wink, I'll get you anyway!"

Mosquito kept Bear hopping about until the sun came up. He wore Bear out completely. Bear didn't get a moment's rest all night. He swatted himself black and blue, trying to get that old Mosquito!

The sun rose. The birds and beasts woke up after a good night's sleep. They sang and jumped with joy. Bear alone did not rejoice at the start of a new day.





Hare met him at the edge of the forest that morning. Shaggy Bear was stumbling along, tripping over his own feet. He could hardly keep his eyes open, he was so sleepy.

How Hare laughed! He nearly split his sides with laughter.

"Well done, Mosquito, well done! But how did you do it?"

"I was not alone," Mosquito replied. "There are lots of us and what we say is All for One and One for All. There's no beating all of us!"

And off he flew: "Zz-ii-nng!"

THE HARE WHO FIBBED

Once Bear stepped on Hare's toe.

"Ouch!" Hare yelped. "Help! Murder!"

Kind old Bear became worried. He felt very sorry for Hare.

"Please forgive me," he said. "You know I didn't do it on purpose. It was an accident."

"A lot of good your apologies will do!" Hare groaned. "You just ruined my paw! How will I ever be able to hop again?"

Bear picked Hare up and carried him home to his den. He put him on his bed and began bandaging his paw.

"Help! Ouch!" Hare screamed, though it did not really hurt that much.

"Ow! I'm dying!"

And so Bear began looking after Hare, feeding him and taking good care of him. The first thing he would say every morning when they woke up was:

"How's your paw today, Long-Ears? Is it getting any better?"

"I can't tell you how it hurts!" Hare would reply. "I thought it was getting better yesterday, but now it hurts worse than ever. I can't even get up."

As soon as Bear would set off into the forest Hare would rip the bandage off his paw and hop around Bear's den, singing at the top of his voice:

*Misha Bear takes care of me,
But I'm as healthy as can be.
Nothing bothers me, you see,
Nothing's wrong, believe me.*

Hare got lazy from lying around doing nothing all day. He became cranky, he began grumbling:

“Why do you feed me nothing but carrots, Bear? Carrots yesterday, carrots again today! First you cripple me and then you want to starve me to death! I want sweet pears and honey!”

And so Bear went off to find sweet pears and honey. On the way he met Fox.

“Where are you going, Misha?” she asked. “You look terribly worried.”

“I’m off to find sweet pears and honey,” he said and told her what had happened.

“That’s not what you need,” she said. “What you need is a doctor!”

“Where can I find one?”

“You don’t have far to go. Don’t you know I’ve been working at the hospital these past few months? Take me to Hare. I’ll cure him in a jiffy.”

Bear took Fox to his den. When Hare saw Fox he began to shake. Fox looked at him and said:

“He’s in a bad way, Bear. See how he’s shaking from a chill! I’d better take him to the hospital. Wolf is a specialist in foot diseases. Together he and I will cure Hare.”

Hare was out of the den and gone in a flash.

“See how quickly he got well!” Fox said.

“We learn a little more each day,” kind old Bear said and fell into bed for a good long rest, for all the time that Hare had been living at his house he had been sleeping on the floor.



HOW THE BIRDS SAVED LITTLE KID

Once upon a time there was a baby goat named Little Kid. Like all baby goats, he was very stubborn. He always wanted to have his own way. One day he decided he would go for a walk as far from home as possible.

"Now don't go far!" his mother warned. "Clouds are gathering in the sky. A storm is blowing up."

"No, it isn't!" Little Kid said and scampered along the path to the distant forest.

It was dark in the forest. Soon it became darker still. The tops of the tall pine trees were bending and swaying in the wind. A big black cloud hung low over the forest. Suddenly a flash of lightning lit up the sky. It was followed by a tremendous crash of thunder.

Little Kid dashed helter-skelter. He was frightened to death, he thought that the lightning and thunder were chasing him. Finally, the big black cloud burst and a terrible rainstorm followed. Sheets of cold rain poured down upon Little Kid, who still kept on running. He was now out of the forest and bounding across a meadow. He was soaked to the skin but the rain still kept coming down in torrents.

When it finally stopped and the sky cleared, Little Kid found himself on a tiny island in the middle of a regular lake. Everything was flooded wherever he looked. All he could see was the tops of some bushes sticking out of the water. It was a long way to dry land.

Little Kid did not know how to swim. There was nothing he could do now but wait for help to come. So he sat down, trembling with cold, and began to wait.

Soon he saw a neighbour, Pig, sailing by in a boat.

"Save me, Piggy! Take me off the island!" Little Kid pleaded. "Let me get into your boat!"

"There's hardly enough room for me!" Pig grunted and sailed right by, bobbing on the waves.

"Shame on you!" Little Kid said and sneezed, "Atishoo! Atishoo!" He had already managed to catch cold.

Pig sailed away in her boat, and Little Kid was all alone again.

Just then two forest bandits appeared on the shore. It was the bloodthirsty Wolf and his wife. The wind had brought the smell of the wet bedraggled kid to their den and they had followed their noses to the edge of the forest. The first thing they saw was a new lake and in the middle of the lake on a tiny island was a little baby goat.

"We haven't had a good piece of tender goat in ages!" Wolf growled.

"What a treat!" his wife said and licked her chops.



"How can we get at him?" Wolf wondered aloud. "We could swim out there, but I don't like to go swimming before dinner."

"Let's hurry back to the den and hear what our brothers have to say," his wife said. "That kid will still be here waiting for us when we return. It'll take a long time for the water to go down."

In a flash both bandits vanished into the bushes. Little Kid, who had never even noticed them, was still sitting on his tiny island.

"Oh dear! Will I just die here?" poor Little Kid wondered miserably as he looked around with frightened eyes. "It'll soon be night-time, and no one has come to rescue me."

"Quack, quack!" said someone above him.

Little Kid looked up and saw a wild duck named Quacky flying by.

"Quack! What are you doing down there?" Quacky asked, circling over the island.

"Can't you see?" Little Kid whined. "I'm sitting here waiting for someone to rescue me. I don't know how to swim or fly, and see how far it is to the shore!"

"Never fear!" Quacky said. "Have patience. We'll rescue you!" She soared high into the sky and was gone.

News of Little Kid's plight travelled quickly through the forest, across the meadows and swamps. Hardly an hour had passed before the kind birds and beasts gathered in a green clearing. Hares came hopping, beavers crawling, cranes flying. Old Lady Heron brought along the two pelicans who were visiting her before flying south for the winter.

Quacky told them of how she had been flying over the meadow that had suddenly turned into a lake and had noticed Little Kid on a tiny island in the middle of it.

"We'll help him!" Old Lady Heron said and looked at the pelicans. They nodded in silence.

"But how?" Stork asked. He had just arrived.

"We'll build a raft and get Little Kid off the island!" the beavers said. They were builders and were always ready to build something.

Everyone got busy. The beavers felled a big tree, then a second and a third. The hares cut off the branches and twigs. The cranes carried the fresh logs to the edge of the water and tied them together. Everyone had a job to do.

Suddenly Sparrow came flying up.

"I just saw Little Kid!" he chirped. Sparrow was all out of breath. "He's crying. He's hungry. He hasn't had a bite to eat since morning."



"We'll have to get him some food!" the hares said, speaking all together, as always.

"Some food!" the cranes agreed.

"Good food!" the beavers said, busy at their work.

"But how will we get it to him?" Stork asked.

Old Lady Heron said nothing. She looked at the two pelicans. They understood her and opened their large beaks. Each had a pile of fish inside. So that is why they had never said a word!

"Quack! Baby goats don't eat fish!" Quacky said. "Don't you know that?"

The pelicans looked at each other and swallowed their fish. Now their beaks were empty. Two lively hares hopped off and were back in no time, carrying bunches of carrots and several heads of cabbage.

The pelicans opened their beaks again, the hares piled in the vegetables, and the birds were off, with Sparrow showing them the way.

A few minutes later they dropped their cargo at Little Kid's feet. How happy he was! Then they turned around and headed back to shore, where the raft was just about ready.

Meanwhile, the bandits were also hard at work. They were sharpening their knives and boiling a cauldron of water. Three young wolves, the most bloodthirsty of the pack, had straddled three logs and were now paddling towards the island, where foolish Little Kid was bleating pitifully.

Luckily, Blue Tit noticed the bandits and came flying to where everyone was working on the raft.

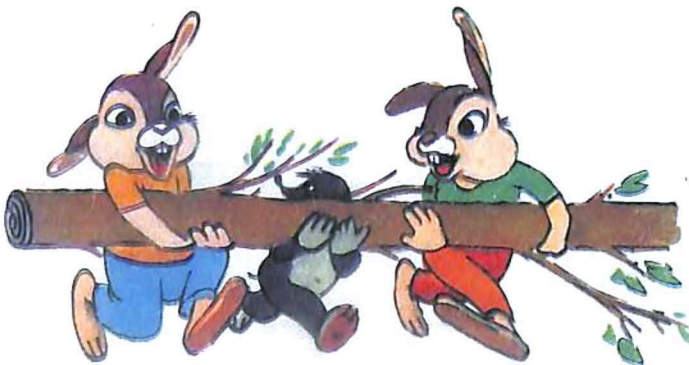
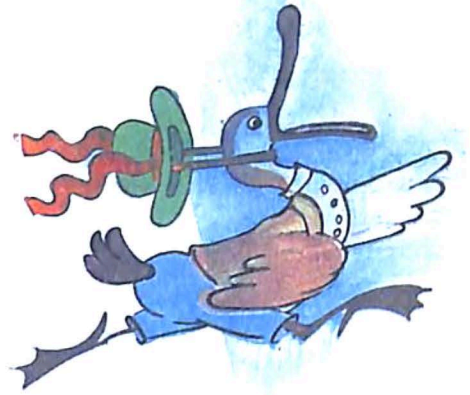
"Hurry, friends! Hurry!" she warned, circling over the busy beavers. "I hope you're not too late! The bandits have nearly reached the island!"

The raft was shoved into the water. A moment later it was bobbing on the waves. The crew of hares was setting the sail.

The birds took wing. First came the cranes, then the wild duck, Quacky, then Stork and Old Lady Heron. They rounded the forest and set their course for the island, flying in a V.

The bandit wolves were rowing away, speaking to each other in low voices.

"It is not far to go now!" the first one said. "We're nearly there!"



“He can’t escape us!” the second one said.

“We’ll catch him for sure!” the third wolf growled.

Ah, but they were sadly mistaken! Before they realised what was happening, the birds attacked. Their sharp beaks battered away at the wolves. First came Crane, then Stork, then Old Lady Heron. The bandits couldn’t dodge their beaks. And then came the pelicans, bringing up the rear. They were flying slowly, because each was carrying a load of stones in his beak. They spilled them out on top of the wolves. This was the last straw. The wolves howled, they tried to cover their heads, they dropped their oars and tumbled into the water.

The bandits tried to save their skins and swim back to shore but the birds kept at them until the last of them had drowned.

Meanwhile, the raft reached the island. Little Kid was so excited he hugged each of the hares in turn. The crew got a fire started on the raft to dry Little Kid and make him warm.

We will not go into all the details of Little Kid’s return. All we will say is that even though his parents were very glad to see him, he tried not to sit on his tail for the next few days, since it was rather sore. But he deserved that spanking!

Mother Goat and Father Goat held a party on the third day. Everyone who had helped save Little Kid was invited. No one was forgotten. There was a place set at the table for Sparrow and a place for Blue Tit. Quacky had the place of honour, for she was the first to help the little baby goat.

Suddenly Pig marched in. She had not been invited.

“Where’s my place?” she grunted.

Everyone pointed to the door.

“There’s only room here for those who know how to help others in trouble!” Father Goat said politely but firmly. “And you behaved very piggishly, neighbour!”

And so Pig went off as she had come, and no one cared a bit.

There was singing and laughter in the home of the goats far into the night, and the sound of munching and crunching good food.

So our story ends in a happy home with true friends gathered round a festive table, though it might have had a very sad ending, indeed.





SUPERSTITIOUS SHAKY-TAIL

A hare named Shaky-Tail was, as you can well imagine, not the bravest hare on earth. On the contrary, he was the most cowardly hare that ever lived. He believed in all sorts of silly superstitions and was forever worrying about something bad that was bound to happen to him.

And in the end it did.

Shaky-Tail's plane was to leave the airport on Friday the 13th. No superstitious hare would ever dream of flying on a Friday that was the 13th! Everyone knows that is an unlucky day. But he had no choice, he had paid for his ticket and had urgent business to attend to.

Shaky-Tail looked at the number stamped on his ticket: it was 2353.

He added the figures up: two plus three, plus five, plus three.... Thirteen! Feeling a slight shiver go down his spine and tail, he decided to add them up in reverse order: three plus five, plus three, plus two.... Thirteen again! There seemed to be no escaping that fatal number!

When his flight was announced it was Flight No. 13 and the number on the plane was 13-13. Poor Shaky-Tail was stunned. When he had taken his seat in the plane he looked around. There were a lot of empty seats on that flight.

Billy Goat and Nanny Goat were up front. Together they must have been over a hundred. Billy Goat looked very learned with his white beard. He was probably a Professor of Cabbages at the very least.

To the right near the window was Kangaroo, with Baby Kangaroo, the image of his mother, poking his head out of her pouch.

Fat Pig was behind them. She had barely managed to squeeze into her seat.

As soon as she was settled she opened her blue zippered bag and began munching on the food she had brought along for the trip.

Pooch was across the aisle from Pig. He was one of those very important-looking dogs. It was difficult to say how old he was. His eyes were a bit watery, but he was still in good shape for the dog shows. Shaky-Tail, whose seat was not far away, noticed several silver medals dangling from his collar. Pooch was leaning back in his seat, reading a copy of the *Veterinary Gazette*.

Then came Tom Cat and Kitty. Shaky-Tail took an immediate dislike to Tom Cat and his whiskers. First of all, he was black, and black cats bring bad luck. Secondly, he had awful manners. He kept mewling and purring loudly in his lady's ear. Kitty was a ginger cat and appeared to have been well brought up. However, she seemed to be enjoying Tom's attentions, smiling shyly and purring in reply. Shaky-Tail could not make out what she said, for just then the engines began to roar.

Plane No. 13-13 was slowly moving on to a runway for takeoff. Suddenly the plane turned sharply and stopped for a moment, as if taking a deep breath before starting. Then



both its engines began to roar, it lunged forward and sped down the runway. In another second it was climbing up into the air, while the buildings that dotted the airfield kept getting smaller and smaller as the plane gained height. Shaky-Tail was more dead than alive from fright. This was his first flight. And if not for the urgent business he had to attend to, he would never have gone by plane.

"Well, I'm flying!" he said to himself, clutching the buckle of his safety belt with both paws. "Now all I have to worry about is landing safely! If not for this being Friday the 13th I might even have enjoyed the flight. After all, you always hear of other people flying."

This calmed his nerves a bit, and he decided to peep out of the window. To tell you the truth, he didn't recognise the earth below. He had been hopping and skipping over it all his life and had never seen far beyond his nose. Now, looking out of the plane, he could see a great big chunk of the earth all at once, with forests and fields, lakes and roads. It was a wonderful sight!

"It simply isn't fair!" he thought. "A common, ordinary Sparrow or Magpie can see this every single day of their lives by just flapping their wings, while we hares can only see such a sight when we buy a plane ticket!"

The plane suddenly lurched. Then it soared unexpectedly.

"This is it!" Shaky-Tail whispered as his head began to spin. "I'd better try to go to sleep. The sooner I do, the better."

He leaned back in his seat and closed his eyes.

Reclining thus with his eyes closed, Shaky-Tail began to think about all sorts of things. His thoughts became jumbled in his little foggy brain. The even hum of the twin engines made him drowsy. At one point he was quite certain he was asleep. Imagine his surprise when his eyes opened and he realised that he hadn't been sleeping after all. Practically all the other passengers were fast asleep, snoring contentedly. Billy and Nanny Goat were asleep. Kangaroo and Baby Kangaroo were dozing. Ginger Kitty had her head on Tom Cat's shoulder and was purring in her sleep. Pig was snoring loudly. She was having nightmares and kept jerking in her sleep. Pooch was the only one awake. He was still reading his paper.

Shaky-Tail looked out of the window. They were flying very high, between the clear blue sky and a heavy blanket of white clouds that looked like a snow-covered field.

"I bet it would be nice to hop along those white hills!" Shaky-Tail thought, but quickly changed his mind, "No, I guess it would be better to fly over them as quickly as possible."

"Could you tell me where we are now?" Shaky-Tail asked Pooch timidly.

"Ask the crew!" Pooch grumbled.

"Where is the crew?" Shaky-Tail asked politely.

"Behind that door!" Pooch replied as crossly as before.

Shaky-Tail got up and headed down the aisle. He turned the knob softly and entered the cabin.

The sight that met his eyes was too terrible for words. The pilot, Bear, was sound asleep at the controls. He was sucking his paw in his sleep and not even the drone of the engines could drown his powerful snoring. His navigator, Gopher, was also sound asleep, curled up by the wireless. Something was beeping and crackling in the earphones, but it did not interfere with his sleep at all.

"This is terrible!" Shaky-Tail mumbled in fright. His heart was beating so fast he thought it would jump out. "I must wake them up."

But all his efforts were in vain. No matter how hard he pounded on Bear's shoulder or shook Gopher, neither of them opened an eye. Meanwhile, the plane kept on flying. The hands on the dials spun around. The engines droned. And none of the passengers had any idea of what was taking place in the cabin. The unlucky signs were beginning to work!

Shaky-Tail was exhausted. He returned to his seat. The other passengers were awake by now. Some of them were eating, others were playing cards or checkers.

"We're heading for a crash! We've got to do something! We can't just sit around like this!" These were Shaky-Tail's thoughts as he walked to the tail of the plane and looked into the baggage compartment.

What was that? There, among the passengers' suitcases and bags were two parachutes.

The passengers were most surprised when Shaky-Tail leaned against the door to the cabin, raised a paw and asked everyone to be silent.

"What does he want?" Kitty purred, leaning towards her companion's ear.

"What can you expect from a hare?" Tom Cat sniffed scornfully.

He was soon sorry he had said that.

Shaky-Tail told them what had happened and ended his little speech by saying: "Don't panic! Everyone must remain in his seat! Only two of us can try to save our lives by jumping."

"Isn't that risky?" old Billy Goat asked with a touch of irony in his voice.

"There are only two parachutes on board," Shaky-Tail replied quite seriously.





"We won't jump," the goats said. "Let someone younger use them."

"Me! I'll j-j-jump!" Tom Cat yowled, stuttering from fright. He dashed down the aisle towards Shaky-Tail. "G-g-give m-m-me a pa-pap-parachute!"

His scornful tone had disappeared completely. Now every hair on his back bristled. He was shaking from head to toe.

"Go back to your seat! And stop stuttering!" Shaky-Tail said.

Tom Cat slunk back to his seat with his tail between his legs. He was not paying any attention to Kitty any more. All he was worried about was his own skin. Poor Kitty was sobbing softly. She was not crying with fright, she was crying because she was so ashamed. She was ashamed of the way he had purred about true friendship and now had proved to be such a coward, so useless in time of trouble.

Shaky-Tail went over to each of the passengers in turn, but everyone, including Pig, refused to jump.

"Let's hope for the best!" they said. "Perhaps Bear will wake up. We haven't really tried to wake him up. But we won't jump, that's for sure! Anyway, there are only two parachutes. What will the others do?"

Tom Cat was the only one who wanted to leave the plane.

Everyone turned away when he grabbed one of the parachutes with shaking paws and got into the harness. Then he jumped head first through the open hatch, yowling as he went.

No matter how hard the passengers tried, they could not waken the crew. Pig grunted right in Bear's ear, Pooch growled and barked, Billy Goat bleated loudly, but all in vain.

The plane kept on flying. The hands on the black and white dials spun around. There were beeping and crackling noises in the earphones. The engines hummed.

"If only..." Shaky-Tail said when they had all gathered in a circle, having lost hope of ever wakening the crew.

"What did you want to say?" Mother Kangaroo said with hope in her voice, pressing Baby Kangaroo to her. He was sleeping peacefully.

"If only one of us knew how to work the wireless!"

"I do," a soft voice said. It was Kitty. She had calmed down and had even powdered her nose.

"What a pleasant surprise!" Shaky-Tail cried happily. "Now we can contact the airfield!"

Everyone at the airfield was very worried. Woodpecker, an experienced radar man, kept twirling the dials, hoping to hear his friend Gopher's voice. But Gopher was silent. All of a sudden there was a funny mewing in Woodpecker's earphones. He listened carefully.

"This is plane 13-13."

"Is that you, Gopher?" Woodpecker asked. "What happened?"

"Mew. The crew is fast asleep," came the answer.

"Who is this?" Woodpecker asked.

"A passenger."

Woodpecker had never taken down such a strange message before.

"Stop fooling around!" he said angrily.

"We're not fooling," the same voice replied. "We don't know what to do. Tell us what to do."

Stork, an old hand at flying and the chief of the airport, called an emergency meeting in his office.

"A terrible thing has happened! Plane 13-13 is out of control."

He had barely finished speaking when Woodpecker dashed into his office. He was out of breath as he handed Stork a radio-gram. This is what it said:

"Have decided to land. Tell us what to do. Shaky-Tail."

Stork could not believe his eyes. He shrugged his wings.

Shaky-Tail had talked it over with the other passengers before taking such a bold decision.

"I'll land the plane!" he had said firmly.

"Will you be able to?" Nanny Goat bleated.

"I'm not sure," Shaky-Tail confessed honestly.

"But I'll try my best. Let's put it to a vote."

Everyone except Pooch raised his paw.

"Are you against my proposal?" Shaky-Tail asked.

"I'm abstaining," Pooch growled. "I can only say that I have to be at the dog show this evening." And he went back to reading the *Veterinary Gazette*.

Having voted for Shaky-Tail to land the plane,



the passengers went back to their seats and fastened their safety belts. Everyone held his breath.

Shaky-Tail took over the controls. There were so many dials, buttons, levers, switches and what-not on the control panel.

The passengers had long since dragged the sleeping Bear and Gopher out of the cramped cabin. They were now snoring in the rear of the plane. No one was paying any attention to them. Everyone was thinking about Shaky-Tail and Kitty who was helping him in the emergency.

Kitty gazed at the bravest hare that ever lived with fond eyes. She kept in touch with Stork, who was supervising the unusual landing.

"Is that clear?" he asked.

"Yes," Kitty replied, pointing out the button or lever Shaky-Tail was to press or pull.

Things did not go very smoothly at first. Shaky-Tail would press the wrong button by accident and the plane would begin to rise. Then he would grab at a lever and it would go into a nose-dive.

Poor Piggy was miserable. She had gobbled up so much food and now all the loops and spins were making her sick.

Billy Goat and Nanny Goat were pressed close together, their eyes shut tight, afraid to move. You could see they were expecting the worst.

The only passenger who was enjoying Shaky-Tail's acrobatics in the air was Baby Kangaroo. He was too young to understand what was happening. He laughed and shrieked whenever the plane soared or dipped unexpectedly. He thought he was in a swing.

Pooch, still looking very important, continued reading his paper. Perhaps he was only pretending to read. Perhaps he did not even know how to read and was just holding the paper up in front of his nose to look important.

Meanwhile, Shaky-Tail was learning how to be a pilot the hard way. Stork deserved the credit, though. His directions were very clear. And if Shaky-Tail did not do everything right you cannot really blame him. After all, many creatures can fly, but he was the first flying hare!

The time had come to land.

Shaky-Tail saw a big meadow and circled over it. There were trees all round the meadow but, luckily, this was no dense forest with huge pines, just a little grove of young birches. Still, they were trees and he would have to fly over them before he could land.

Shaky-Tail had his eyes fixed on the trees as he clutched the steering wheel with both paws. He knew that everything depended on him, on his courage and will-power.

If only it were not Friday the 13th!

“Hang on, Shaky-Tail!” he said to himself as he came in for a landing.

“Hang on, Shaky-Tail!” a gentle voice mewed behind him.

“It’s up to you now, Shaky-Tail!” the passengers whispered.

At that very moment the wings sliced off the tops of the trees. The plane shuddered, but it did not fall apart. Another second passed. There was a bump, then another bump and it stopped at the edge of the meadow, its propellers resting against a huge haystack.

Shaky-Tail stretched and ... opened his eyes. What a surprise! The plane had landed. The passengers were walking down the ramp. Black Tom Cat and ginger Kitty were the last ones out. She did not even look his way as they passed, while her whiskered companion rammed his suitcase into Shaky-Tail. And did not even bother to apologise.

Shaky-Tail was stunned. Was it all a dream? So he had not done a very brave thing after all? He was ready to cry. But then he remembered about the unlucky signs: it was Friday the 13th!

“Would you please tell me the time?” he asked Bear who was now passing down the aisle, looking very handsome in his pilot’s cap.

“Thirteen hours on the dot!” the pilot of plane No. 13-13 answered in his gruff voice.

From that day on Shaky-Tail stopped being superstitious and became... Well, we cannot say he is the bravest hare of all, but if we say he is the wisest one we will not be far wrong.



DISOBEDIENCE HOLIDAY

A TALE FOR CHILDREN AND PARENTS

The events in this tale never happened, although they might have, and yet if they did... In short, one morning a little boy walked down the main street of a big city, or rather, he didn't walk, but was pulled and dragged while he dug in his heels, stamped his feet, fell on his knees, sobbing desperately and howling in a dreadful voice:

"I want more ice-cream!"

"You've had your lot," his mother calmly said, firmly grasping the hand. "Not a bit more!"

But the Boy just kept on howling all down the street:

"I want more ice-cream!"

In this way, they reached their house, walked to the top floor and entered their flat. Here Mother led the Boy into a small room, stood him in a corner and said sternly:

"You'll stay like that until I forgive you!"

"And what must I do?" asked the Boy, stopping his noise.

"Think!"

"About what?"

"About what a dreadful child you are!" replied Mother, and left the room, locking the door.

The dreadful child began thinking. At first he thought about how chocolate ice-cream was much tastier than any other flavour. Then he thought some more, and

decided that if you first ate any ice-cream and then, straight afterwards, a piece of chocolate ice-cream, the taste of chocolate would remain in your mouth, while there would be two portions of ice-cream in your stomach. In fact, this was the very cause of the disgraceful scene that had taken place in the street between him and Mother. Now he realised clearly that the scene really had been disgraceful, for through his tears he had seen passers-by turning round, looking at him, shaking their heads and saying just like Mother:

"What a dreadful child!"

Then, too, the Boy began thinking how bad it was to be small, and that he wanted to grow up quicker because grown-ups were allowed everything and children nothing. But then, suddenly, behind his back he heard a loud knocking on the windowpane.

The Boy didn't turn round at once, though. Only when the knock was repeated did he cautiously turn his head. Frankly speaking, at first he thought it was the pecking of a pigeon he knew and whom he sometimes fed with breadcrumbs. But



just fancy his surprise when we saw in the window not a pigeon but a huge Paper Kite. The Kite had got caught on something and the wind was now battering it against the windowpane.

The Boy went to the window, flung it open and helped the Kite to get free. It was an unusually large and fine Kite. It was made of strong wooden struts pasted over with thick waxpaper. Someone had painted a pair of big blue eyes with brown eyelashes, a mauve nose and orange lips on it. But its chief decoration was a long, long tail.

"Thank you, lad," suddenly said the Paper Kite, when it was free at last. "What is your name?"

"My name is Dreadful Child."

"And what are you indoors for?"

"I've been punished."

"What have you been up to?"

"Well, you see, it's a very long story. My mother punished me."

"Always the same thing!" said the Paper Kite feelingly. "Never in my life have I met little children who were not punished. However, I do know a place where all that has been done away with. I was just going to fly there today, but accidentally got my tail caught in this horrible drainpipe."

"Take me with you!" begged the Boy.

"Why not indeed? I suppose it would be much jollier together! Hold on to my tail—tighter!—and try not to look down, so as not to feel giddy."

The Boy grabbed the Kite by the tail with both hands, kicked off with both feet from the windowsill, and the next minute was flying over his house, over the entire city and its suburbs, then over fields and woods, rivers and lakes, looking down boldly from high above the earth, and honestly not feeling giddy at all...

* * *

The clock on the city tower struck midnight.

Father, Mother, Grandad and Granny stood in the room, silently watching the sleeping twins—Parsnip and Turnip. They lay fast asleep in their cots snuffling and smiling blissfully in their dreams.

"Look!" whispered Father in a very displeased tone. "They're daring to smile! Must be dreaming of that jar of strawberry jam which they ate last week without permission."

"Or the tube of ultramarine paint which they painted our poor cat with!" grumbled Grandad. He was an artist and was very angry when the children touched his paints.

"Well, time to be off!" said Father resolutely. "They won't wait for us any longer."

Mother went up to the cots and bent over Parsnip to kiss his forehead.

"Don't!" Father said quietly. "He might wake up, and then we won't be able to go anywhere."



Grandmother went to Turnip's cot and tucked in the blanket. Then, on the quiet, she brushed off a tear which was rolling down her cheek.

"This time we ought to be firm," whispered Grandad, taking up a big travel bag in one hand and a box with paints and brushes in the other and turning to the door.

"Come on, come on," said Father hastily, heaving a huge knapsack with all kinds of things in it onto his back. Mother slung two rugs over her arm, Granny took her knitting basket, which she never parted with, and all

four tip-toed out of the room, closing the door behind them.

...The city or, rather, all the city children, were fast asleep. Stretched out or curled up in their cots and beds, they slept the deep sleep of childhood, tired of running about all day or crying about their childish hurts, punished by their parents for naughtiness or disobedience, for poor marks at school, for trampled flowerbeds and windows smashed by footballs, for torn clothes, and for many, many other pranks—freckled tousleheads looking like little devils, blonde darlings resembling little angels—with scratches and bruises on their skinny knees, with a last milk tooth lost in a fight, pressing toy pistols and dolls to their breasts. Children will be children... And in their sleep they laughed and cried too, because some of them had nice dreams, while others had sad or frightening ones, depending on how they had spent the day. But not even in their dreams could they have imagined that at just that moment, in the dead of night, their mummies and daddies, their grandads and grandmas were streaming along wide streets, narrow alleys and winding, unlit lanes from all sides of the city into its central square.

By midnight, all the grown-up population of the city had gathered in the big square named after the Courageous Traveller. All of them had come there: those who only yesterday had baked puffy scones and buns with raisins, who had sold bright ice-cream cones on the streets and shops, who had vaccinated children, filled in their teeth spoiled by toffees and sweets and cured chills and colds. Punctual as ever, came strict teachers who used red ink to give low marks for prompting in class, and sweet-smelling barbers who had cut children's hair as their mummies asked.

Together with them came tailors and cobblers, postmen and plumbers, bus, tram, trolleybus, and tube train drivers, salesmen from every shop, watchmen and janitors... All of them came into the square, leaving their children asleep at their homes.

The Father, Mother, Grandfather and Grandmother of Parsnip and Turnip appeared in the square at the moment when the father of the largest family in the city, Doctor Ear-Nose-and-Throat, lean as a flagpole, climbed on the pedestal of the monument to the Courageous Traveller, and clinging to one of his bronze legs,

addressed the gathering. His voice faltered with excitement and every now and then he put a handkerchief to his eyes.

"It is very difficult for us all, yet we must find the strength to carry out our decision, once we have approved it—that our beloved, yet rude and lazy, naughty and stubborn children will wake up and find themselves all alone. I myself have thirteen children," he continued, "yet never have I seen any gratitude from them; all I ever heard was 'I want' and 'I don't want', 'I will' and 'I won't'. But now I'm tired of fighting and struggling with my children. And all of us here are in the same position—we have all lost patience! There is only one way out: to surrender the city to our children. Our dreadful children! Let us not stand in their way. Let them live as they like and do as they please! Then we shall see what happens. Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for listening

Swallowing his tears and manfully suppressing his sobs, the doctor climbed down from the pedestal and was lost in the crowd. Women sobbed. The faces of many men also showed that it wasn't easy for them either. When the town clock struck two, not a single grown-up remained in the city.

* * *

The first to wake up was Parsnip. Rubbing his eyes, he looked around and saw that Turnip was still asleep. At one jerk he yanked off her blanket, tugged at her little bare foot, pinched it, and stuck his tongue out at her.

"Nobody woke us up—I woke by myself," said Parsnip to his sister. "Get up! Or else we'll be late for school."

"Why, isn't it Sunday today?" asked Turnip, yawning blissfully.

"Sunday was yesterday. Today, I'm sorry to say, is just an ordinary Monday."

"If only Sunday was every day! Why did they have to invent Mondays, Tuesdays and all the



rest?" exclaimed Turnip. She sighed sadly, stretched and lazily began to dress.

Neither Father, nor Mother, nor Grandad, nor Granny were at home. At first the children thought that Daddy had already gone to work and Mother to the baker's for bread. But where could Grandad and Granny have gone to? They never got up so early!

"Why didn't anyone wake us up?" said Parsnip in alarm.

"And why didn't they make our breakfast?"

Turnip thought aloud.

And then suddenly on the kitchen table the children saw a big sheet of paper with the following written in Daddy's firm hand:

"Children! When you read this letter we will already be far away. Don't look for us. We have decided to leave you to your own resources. No one will scold or reproach you any more, no one will make you do anything. We're tired of your disobedience.

"Father."

Lower down in Mother's tiny hand was this addition:

"Be careful with the gas and water—turn them off when not in use! Don't stand on the windowsills. There's food in the fridge.

"Mother."

Still lower down in small block letters was a note from Granny and Grandad:

"And please water the flowers in our room."

Parsnip read the note aloud, scratched the back of his head and looked in a lost way at Turnip, who returned an equally puzzled glance from the very edge of the chair on which she was sitting.

"Remember, Parsnip, what Mummy used to tell us?"

"What?"

"If you don't stop being naughty, we'll go away and never come back! Now they've done it!"

Turnip's chin trembled but she managed not to cry.

"They've decided to frighten us a bit! Just wait: we'll come back from school, and they'll all be at home," said Parsnip confidently and opened the fridge. It was full of all sorts of food. Parsnip took a cooked sausage out of a plastic bag, broke it in two and offered one half to his sister.

"But we haven't washed or brushed our teeth yet," said Turnip uncertainly.

"I'm clean!" mumbled Parsnip with his mouth full.

"What if they don't come back?" asked Turnip anxiously. "How are we going to live without them?"

"They'll come back all right," said Parsnip, waving his hand. "Quick, let's run



off to school. We've got a drawing lesson first, and I want to draw a blue cat."

Parsnip almost choked with laughter. Turnip also broke out laughing. They remembered their cat Poops who had had to be taken to the cleaners' after they painted him blue.

"Do you remember the name of Grandpa's paint?"

"Yes," said Turnip, "ultramarine!"

* * *

It was far from an ordinary Monday.

Down the boulevards and streets, past the windows of toy shops, sweet shops and so on, down narrow lanes and winding, lampless alleys, with schoolbags in their hands and satchels on their backs, crossing the streets wherever they liked, running and skipping, children hurried to school. Nobody stopped them or whistled at them when they broke the rules of the road: in the whole city, in the houses and in the streets there was not a single soul besides themselves. On the way, they shared the astounding news with each other, but it instantly stopped being news, because, as we already know, that fine morning all the children in the city had woken to discover the total disappearance of their parents.

Parsnip and Turnip, out of breath, barely squeezed their way through the crowd of children chattering in the schoolyard, discussing the absolutely amazing event, and ran into their classroom.

The classroom was in an indescribable uproar, the likes of which had never been seen or heard of before. The boys were jumping from desk to desk, chasing each other and trying to whack each other on the backs with their textbooks. The girls were screaming with inexplicable delight. The aquarium had already been overturned, and from time to time the little red goldfish leapt up merrily in the puddle on the floor. All across the blackboard ran the chalked announcement: "NO MORE LESSONS!"

The same thing was happening in all the other classrooms. All blackboards bore the same inscriptions: "NO MORE LESSONS!"

The teachers' room was empty. There was a padlock on the door of the headmaster's study. Nobody was on duty in the cloakroom.

"Well, I never," said Parsnip. "Now we can have a real good rest!"

"It looks as if they've all joined up against us; even the teachers!" squeaked Turnip.

"They've decided to teach us a lesson. Well, let's see what will come of it," said her self-assured brother.



Parsnip and Turnip walked towards a makeshift platform, an overturned barrel, from the top of which a boy nicknamed Cockroach was holding forth.

"At last there's no one to order us about," yelled Cockroach, purple with excitement. "Nobody will make us do anything we don't want to! Long live Disobedience Holiday! Stand on your heads, crawl on all fours! Nobody will say anything!"

"Or punish us!" came somebody's shrill voice from the crowd.

"Or punish us!" confirmed Cockroach, and, to drive his point home, he stood on his head for a moment, then jumped off the barrel and walked on all fours. His classmates, nicknamed Roaches, all applauded, stood on their heads all together, and also crawled on all fours. Like monkeys, they copied Cockroach in everything.

A snubnosed, tousle-headed boy climbed on the barrel. He was one of the thirteen children of Doctor Ear-Nose-and-Throat. His school nickname was Pistol. One day he had made himself a toy pistol, loaded it with real gunpowder, then aimed and fired it. He was lucky not to have lost his right eye.

"Listen to what I'm going to tell you," Pistol addressed the children crowding around him. "I've got six brothers and six sisters, and we have also been left all alone. They always threatened to leave us, and now at last they have! Here's what they wrote to us." Pistol fumbled in the pockets of his faded jeans, pulled out a crumpled piece of paper, smoothed it on his knee and began reading it aloud: "Dreadful children!.."

However, nobody listened to him; everyone was hurrying off somewhere.

"Let's get out of here," Parsnip told Turnip, "or else we won't get anything."

"What do you want to get?"

"You'll see yourself."

Parsnip took his sister's hand and pulled her along after him.

Under the old chestnut-tree in the middle of the schoolyard, satchels and schoolbags were being flung down with dull thuds until they made a great heap. Running past the tree, Parsnip and Turnip followed the others' example, and, relieved of their burdens, rushed out through the gates of the empty school.

* * *

A most unusual feast was in full swing at SWEET-TOOTH the sweet shop—its total supply of ice-cream was rapidly being devoured.

It was a veritable invasion of sweet-lovers. In less than a quarter of an hour not only were all the tables in the sweet shop occupied but children were making themselves comfortable on the windowsills and even on the floor.

It is hard to imagine how much chocolate, vanilla, strawberry, pineapple, apricot and lemon ice-cream can be eaten by a single sweet-tooth, if not stopped in time.

The sweet-lovers did not eat the ice-cream with teaspoons from little cups, nor did they lick it with their tongues from cones—they scooped it with tablespoons from soup-plates! They didn't wait patiently till it melted in their mouths, but hurriedly swallowed it, as a result of which some of them soon grew hoarse and Cockroach lost his voice altogether. Gobbling up everything there was in their

plates, the sweet-lovers immediately ran up to the counter for more. The unused cones which nobody picked up crackled under their feet.

"I can't eat any more and I'm afraid I'm frozen to my chair," Turnip wheezed. Her little nose had gone blue and there was frost on her lashes.

"Perhaps we should take along everything we didn't eat?" suggested Parsnip. He too was shivering after his tenth helping of chocolate ice-cream. Scarcely had he uttered the words, when a wet pink ball of strawberry ice-cream thrown by someone hit him right on the nose and flopped down before him on the table. Another similar ball hit Turnip on the back of her head.

The twins looked around and saw the Ear-Nose-and-Throat children, who, having eaten their fill of ice-cream, had begun a wild game of snowballs. From the other end the Roaches headed by Cockroach responded, and if Parsnip and Turnip hadn't jumped out of the shop, they would willy-nilly have been drawn into the raging battle.

As they walked along the street, the town clock struck twelve—it was noon on the first day of Disobedience Holiday.



* * *

The midget was called Fantik—which really was his name, and no nickname. Fantik lived in the suburbs in a teeny-weeny neat-and-cosy house with a red-tiled roof and carved wooden shutters. He slept in a little cot and bought his clothes at the Children's World department store. Nobody knew exactly how old he was, although everyone knew that he certainly wasn't a child.

Fantik was a bachelor and had never had to bring up children, much less punish them. He had always thought of them as kind, jolly friends and was convinced that children brought nothing but joy. He met them only on Sundays at the circus. During his performances, they would laugh loudly, stamping their feet with impatience, and all clapping their hands, applauding the midgets of whom Fantik was the tallest.

A few days before the events that took place in the city, the circus had gone off on tour. Fantik was left behind, however, as he had sprained his ankle during a rehearsal and couldn't walk properly. On the great night, no one remembered him, thinking he had long since left together with his troupe of midgets and the other performers.

That parentless morning Fantik had woken up in excellent spirits. His foot had almost stopped hurting and he decided that he would go to town straight after breakfast and buy himself a walking stick. After making his bed neatly, he turned on the radio to do his usual morning exercises to music. For some reason, the radio was silent. Fantik was surprised. Nevertheless, he did his exercises, mentally humming to

himself his favourite *Song of the Gnomes*. Then he took a shower under the watering-can he had specially arranged, brushed his teeth, combed his hair, boiled himself one soft egg for breakfast, drank a little mug of milk with a rusk, and, not forgetting to water the dainty little flowerbed in the front garden planted with forget-me-nots and pansies, he wheeled his bicycle to the gate and rode off down the street.

The first thing that struck him was that nobody overtook him. Nobody rode towards him, either. The traffic lights at the crossings did not change. There were no other pedestrians in the streets except children. Here and there, alone or in groups, they stood, walked or ran about. As Fantik approached the city centre, the numbers of children kept growing and growing. Some of them rode bicycles or scooters, moving beside him or overtaking him, paying no attention to him whatsoever.

On entering the Square of the Courageous Traveller, Fantik had to brake hard and almost fell off his bike: two little boys had darted out into the road right in front of him. They were carrying buckets full of paint.

"Look out, you silly things," said Fantik crossly. "I might have bumped right into you. Why don't you obey the traffic rules? Do you want your parents to be fined?"

"We haven't got any parents!" replied one of the Ear-Nose-and-Throat boys in a hoarse voice and sneezed.

"They've left us," confirmed another Ear-Nose-and-Throat boy and sneezed too.

"But why aren't you at school?"

"Everybody's run away!"

"What do you mean 'run away'?" Fantik asked again.

"What's the matter with you? Have you only just woken up or something?" said the Ear-Nose-and-Throat boys crossly. "Go ride your bike, you little goody-goody!"

Nobody had ever talked to Fantik like that. He was so offended that he choked and tears came to his eyes. He wanted to say something, to explain, but the boys were already too far away.

* * *

In class you mostly have to draw not what you want, but, say, sketch in your album a vase of flowers or an earthenware pot, or, if you're lucky, an apple, which you can pinch on the quiet after the lesson and eat in the toilet.



Using chalk, charcoal or paints right in the street to draw anything that comes to your head anywhere you want is quite another matter.

The Ear-Nose-and-Throat children captured the right hand side of Musketeers Street, while the Roaches had to be content with the left side, which they were now all decorating, doing their best to outdraw Pistol and his family team. On the Ear-Nose-and-Throat side there were more fences, which are easier to draw on than houses whose ground floors are full of windows and doors. On the Roaches' side, though, there were plenty of shopwindows, and the Roaches made a point of painting them with all sorts of funny faces with stuck-out tongues, as well as ships and steam-engines with dense black smoke pouring out of their funnels.

Pistol, though, showed himself to be more imaginative and inventive. His father, Doctor Ear-Nose-and-Throat, was the most peaceable person in the city, treating children and adults for sore throats and earaches, but Pistol himself wanted to become an army officer, and so, issuing orders to his brothers and sisters, he painted great battles on every fence: tanks advancing on their caterpillar tracks, planes dropping bombs, cannon shooting, rockets flying, wounded soldiers falling, ships exploding and breaking up... And all this was first drawn with charcoal, then filled in with paint—blue and green—which the Ear-Nose-and-Throat children fetched from somewhere in buckets and tin cans.

Parsnip and Turnip appeared in the street at the very moment when Pistol, biting his lip, was finishing the picture of a burning enemy tank.

"May we draw somewhere too?" Parsnip asked politely.

"Find yourself another street," Pistol snapped in reply, and, dipping his brush into a can with red paint, drew the flames enveloping the tank's turret.

"Greedy bass!" whispered Turnip, and they crossed over to the other side of the street.

The Roaches turned out to be more hospitable. They knew that the twins' grandfather was a real painter, so they felt obliged to give Turnip and Parsnip a place near the window of a furniture shop. This window was already covered with drawings; the one clean spot left over was a small patch of glass in the lower right-hand corner.

Parsnip dipped his brush into a bucket of blue paint and very quickly drew a blue cat on the glass.

"Give it green eyes," suggested Turnip.

One of the Roachers handed Parsnip a tube of green paint, and the blue cat immediately acquired a pair of twinkling green eyes.

"Look, look, Parsnip! There's our Poops!" suddenly cried Turnip, seizing her brother by the hand.

Excited by the hated smell of oil paints, Poops was tearing down the street, in a terrible hurry



to get away from the children who had once already been the cause of a visit to the dry cleaners', where by some miracle he had been restored to his original colour.

* * *

Fantik rounded the corner and found himself in Musketeers Street. What he now saw there took his breath away. It was no longer a street, but a real children's picture show. Except that the show could not be sent anywhere abroad, because only water could remove the drawings from the walls of houses, fences and shopwindows.

A little girl was walking past a big fence, along the length of which an unknown artist had drawn a picture of a great battle. Picking her nose from time to time, she was carefully examining the panorama.

Fantik rode up.

"Could you ever draw anything like that?" the girl suddenly asked Fantik.

"No," the dwarf admitted honestly.

"I think so too. Let's go and look!"

"Where? At what?" asked Fantik.

"At the next street. They've begun drawing there too. Let me climb on your luggage-rack. My name is Plum-Stone, because I once nearly choked on one, and if it weren't for Pistol's father, nobody knows what could have happened."

Fantik hadn't time to utter a word before the girl was already perched on his luggage-rack and they were off. However, not a living soul could be seen in that street, nor in the next.

"Fantastic!"

Fantik thought he heard someone was calling his name and turned round.

"Fantastic!" repeated the girl behind him on the bike and pointed at the coloured sweet wrappings strewn over the street.



"You know what, let's ride home to them! Turn left here, then straight, then a little to one side, and then it's quite near—round just one more corner."

Fantik again gave no answer, but went on pedalling. A good thing his foot had stopped hurting!

"What is most amazing," thought Fantik, turning his pedals, "is that no one seems to recognise me! Yes, of course, I perform in a costume trimmed with gold braid and have my

make-up on. If this Plum-Stone knew she wasn't being driven by a boy, but by a grown-up man and a circus actor into the bargain, she'd fall off the bike with surprise!"

Meanwhile, Fantik had decided to get some more details from the girl, concerning the events in the city.

In real military style, Plum-Stone reported the situation.

"And what about you? Hasn't anybody left you? Are you an orphan? Why do you keep asking me about things as if you came from another town? But wait—stop—we're already there!"

Plum-Stone jumped off the bike.

"There, they live in that house."

Smoke was pouring from a window on the first floor, "Fire!" the thought flashed through Fantik's mind.

But Plum-Stone was absolutely calm.

"It's their window. They're at home. Come on! By the way, you haven't yet told me your name."

"You'll find that out in due course," thought Fantik.

Fantik and Plum-Stone went up the stairs to the first floor, where one of the doors displayed a brass plate: "Doctor Ear-Nose-and-Throat. Adults on Mondays from two to five p. m. Children at any time of day or night."

Everything in the flat was upside down.

Having decorated both sides of Musketeers Street, the Ear-Nose-and-Throat children and the Roaches had come to an agreement, namely, that while Pistol had produced a wonderful war picture, the Roaches had shown amazing skill in depicting animals. Besides that, they had drawn a steam-engine pulling fifteen carriages plus a blue cat with green eyes.

Concluding that neither side had outdone the other, nor therefore, won the contest, both parties decided to celebrate the unusual drawing lesson at the Ear-Nose-and-Throat's flat, where they had promptly assembled, all covered in paint of every colour of the rainbow, merry and pleased with themselves. From early morning they had been doing as they liked and nobody had so much as commented.

Now they were sitting all over the place in the Doctor's own study and smoking! Yes—smoking!

Cockroach, who had lost his voice altogether from all the ice-cream he had eaten, had found some cigarettes and cigars and shared them out. He kept the largest cigar for himself so as to "clear his throat properly". Pistol had stuffed his father's old pipe with tobacco and now lay on the floor, puffing like a steam-engine.

In spite of the open window, the children were making so much smoke in the room that they could hardly see each other. The girls, who weren't smoking themselves, kept coughing, choking with tobacco smoke, but put up with it.

Parsnip finished his cigarette but felt sick and staggered to the door.

"Where are you off to?" asked Pistol. "Nobody's leaving yet. Go on smoking."

"I feel giddy," answered Parsnip, just barely managing to grab the back of a chair to keep himself from falling.



Poor Fantik almost fainted on crossing the threshold. He had never been able to bear tobacco smoke but he couldn't just turn round and leave. How could he abandon children in distress? What if something dreadful should happen? And something dreadful had already happened: a little girl was lying unconscious on the floor by the door!

Fantik mustered all his strength and hauled Turnip out on to the landing.

After a breath of fresh air, Turnip recovered.

"I haven't died, have I?" she asked softly, as she saw Fantik's wrinkled little face bending over her. "Fantik!" she whispered. "Fantik! I know you! I've seen you at the circus—you were getting out of a box full of pigeons. Was it you who saved me? Thank you!"

Fantik helped Turnip to her feet.

"Parsnip, where are you?" she called in a weak voice.

"I'm here," came a still weaker voice.

"Are you alive?"

"I don't know!"

"We've got Fantik here!"

On hearing the familiar name, the smoking children rose from their seats. Who among them didn't know the actor from the troupe of midgets? Everybody knew him. He would ride round the ring on a little pony and then vanish in order to reappear high above the audience in a box full of white pigeons. Fantik! He alone hadn't left the city, he alone had stayed with the "dreadful children"!

Plum-Stone's eyes almost popped out, staring at Fantik. Cockroach tried to shout "Hurrah!" but smoking the cigar had not helped his throat so he was only able to wheeze like a tap when the water has been turned off at the mains.

"Children!" Fantik said, "please don't think I've come here just to tell you about the harm of smoking! I am here entirely by chance. Plum-Stone and I were riding past when we saw smoke coming from your window. I thought the house was on fire. I won't get in your way. But just in case, remember my address: 7, Circusmen's Road." Coughing and dabbing his eyes with a handkerchief, Fantik left the room. No, he wasn't crying, although there was good reason to do so.

Cockroach, Pistol and several other members of both gangs crawled out of the room on to the landing to have a look at Fantik and see him off. But somehow, they were all sick there—perhaps because of the fresh air...

Meanwhile, Fantik was already far away, pedalling on his child-size bicycle through the city, feeling very anxious and ill-at-ease. He hadn't bought himself a walking stick after all: all the shops were closed.



* * *

Towards evening all the children wandered off to their homes.

The Roaches decided to spend the night at the Ear-Nose-and-Throats.

With dreadful colds and splitting headaches, and having smoked themselves dizzy, they lay wherever they could on armchairs and chairs. Cockroach himself had crawled under the grand piano and lay sprawling on the floor.

Parsnip and Turnip went to their own house. The Ear-Nose-and-Throat children had invited them to stay too, but the only room still free was the bathroom.

"I've got a sore throat—I can't swallow," complained Turnip before falling asleep.

"And I've got a headache. What will we do if we fall ill?"

"Cure ourselves, of course. With medicine."

"What medicine?"

"Oh, any medicine."

"You can't take just any medicine. That can make you even worse."

"What a pity Fantik isn't a doctor!" Turnip sighed. "I feel hot. Get me a bit of ice from the fridge to suck."

* * *

The town clock struck midnight, then one, two and three, but Fantik still tossed and turned in his little cot. Only at the very break of dawn he fell into a light, uneasy sleep. He dreamed he was saving children from fires, pulling them out of water, taking them off roofs and confiscating cigarettes and matches. He was woken by an anxious knocking on his door.

He found Parsnip on the doorstep.

"What's happened?" asked Fantik, rubbing his eyes and shivering in the morning cold.

"Turnip is dying," said Parsnip and burst into tears.

"What's the matter with her?"

"I don't know. She's ill. In the middle of the night she started calling for Mummy, but now she's quiet and won't say a word."

"All right," said Fantik, "I'll get dressed right away." When Fantik arrived, Turnip lay with her eyes closed. Fantik touched her forehead: it was burning. Turnip opened her eyes and blinked.

"Oh, Fantik! Have you come to save me? Help me, so I won't die!"

Fantik sat down on the edge of the bed.

"I'm not a doctor, you know. I can only try."

"Do try, please!"

Fantik thought hard. He had never tried treating children before. Perhaps he should make Turnip drink a glass of hot milk? When Fantik himself caught a cold, he always drank hot milk.





"I don't want any milk!" Turnip grimaced.
 "I won't drink it!"

"If you don't do what I say, I'll stop trying to help you."

"All right, I'll obey you," agreed Turnip.
 "Otherwise you'll go away, like they all did."

"There isn't any milk," said Parsnip. "We drank it all up yesterday."

* * *

Everything that could be closed and locked, the grown-ups had shut tight before their departure and locked up, leaving only those things open to the children that

were the most frequent cause of tears in their families. There was no milk at the dairy, no bread at the baker's, no vegetables at the greengrocer's, and no meat at the butcher's. Only at SWEET-TOOTH the sweet shop and AROMA the tobacconist's did a few kinds of sweets and tobacco goods remain untouched. But all the ice-cream, all the pastry and chocolate had been devoured and all the fruit water lapped up during the first day of Disobedience Holiday.

Walking into the yard, Fantik found a window that had not been shut quite tight. Opening it, he penetrated into the dairy. He knew there was no one to bother about a small lad climbing into the window, and yet Fantik felt a bit ashamed. In other circumstances he would never have taken such liberties. But what wouldn't one do for a sick child?

Several bottles of milk stood on the counter.

Fantik opened one of them and drank a little. The milk had gone sour...

Coming out into the yard, Fantik met the cat Poops. That wily creature, too, must have been looking for a crack in order to enter the shop and steal something worthwhile.

"There's nothing left in the shop," said Fantik. "Go and catch mice!"

The cat miaowed in comprehension and dived under the gate.

Of course, the simplest thing would be to give Turnip some kind of medicine, but there was no doctor to prescribe it, and no chemist to dispense it.

Returning without any milk, Fantik boiled a pail of hot water and covering Turnip's head with a fluffy bath towel, let her breathe hot air over the pail. She immediately felt better and began to look brighter.

"Fantik! Do stay and live with us!" she suggested. "Parship and I can sleep in one cot, and he'll let you have his. It's just your size."

"I think I'd better come and visit you now and then. But now I must go and see if somebody else needs help," replied Fantik and waved his little hand to Turnip from the doorway.

Meanwhile, someone was already shouting from the yard:

"Parship! Turnip! Is Fantik with you by any chance?"

* * *

The second day of Disobedience Holiday arrived, but the atmosphere in the city was no longer festive.

Haggard, unwashed, uncombed and sleepy children lounged about the streets. Some of them had stomach aches and others were coughing and sneezing. On every boulevard you could see sad little boys with their fathers' pipes in their teeth and little girls smeared with their mothers' lipstick and their grandmothers' rouge.

The canaries in their cages were all ruffled up and had stopped singing. The flowers on the windowsills had faded and their heads were drooping, for there was no one to remind the children to feed the birds and water the flowers in time.

Hunger at last drove the cats to catch mice.

* * *

The grown-ups had vanished without leaving any clue as to where the children could find them. They had pitched their camp at a spot chosen on the map by a teacher nicknamed Globe.

At the beginning far from all parents had shared the viewpoint of Doctor Ear-Nose-and-Throat. It was he who had first suggested leaving the children on their own for a time, unwatched by their parents, but after discussion, everybody agreed with him, although parting with "those dreadful children" was going to be sheer agony for all of them.

The first day in the parents' camp was spent in reminiscences. Sitting up late into the night by their bonfires, the mummies, daddies, grandads and grannies remembered every single childish prank, escapade and misbehaviour that they could think of. They quoted glaring examples of childish selfishness, obstinacy, laziness, lying, rudeness and disobedience. Going on with their recollections, many of the parents suddenly discovered that they themselves too had once been "dreadful children".

All night long the sound of subdued whispering and sobbing could be heard from the tents.

"They may drown themselves!" whispered someone's mother.

"But there isn't any river or lake there," someone's father reassured her.

"They could get drowned in a bathtub," insisted someone's granny.

"They don't like taking baths," someone's grandad comforted her.

* * *

Meanwhile, the Paper Kite with the Boy on its tail flew on and on.

"Are you flying the right way?" asked the Boy as they dived from one cloud into another. "Because I'm tired of holding on to you!"

"Patience. We'll soon be there."





"How did you discover about this place?"

"I overheard the boys who were flying me today. Now wait a moment, don't distract me! We've got to steer around that stormcloud, or else we may be struck by lightning!"

Caught up by a strong gust of wind, Paper Kite zoomed upwards, banked to starboard, and just touching the fringe of an ordinary raincloud, began skirting the dark stormcloud, all packed with thunderbolts and lightnings.

The Boy closed his eyes tightly from fear and clutched the Paper Kite's tail.

* * *

Tired and exhausted, Fantik returned to his own house. For quite a long time he couldn't fall asleep: the events of the long day flashed before his eyes in the minutest detail. From morning until late into the evening he had been busy helping various children. They had almost pulled him to pieces! He had applied lotion to black eyes and copper coins to bruises. He had put hot-water bottles on children's tummies and told them fairy tales to stop them from crying and calling for their mothers. He had undressed and washed them, because they would flop down on their beds in their clothes and refused to wash their dirty feet before going to bed. He had... It would be too difficult to describe all that he had done on that crazy day. But no matter how hard he tried, and no matter what he invented, he could never replace a father, mother, grandad or grandma for anyone.

"Goodness, how long can all this go on?" thought Fantik, tossing and turning in his bed.

A troubled night descended on the city.

The smallest children cried in their sleep: "I want my mummy!" Those who were older had nightmares—they dreamt someone was giving them ice-cream. This woke them up, and they spent long hours lying with their eyes wide open, thinking how good it would be to sleep again, and wake up in the morning at the touch of a gentle hand and a familiar voice saying: "Time to get up!" Then they fell asleep again, leaving wet tears of repentance on their pillows.

* * *

Parsnip woke up to the chiming of the town clock.

Turnip was already quite well—nothing hurt her.

"Let's go to school!" Parsnip suddenly said.

"What for?"

"Oh, just to have a look."

So they both got up and ran off to school.

In the schoolyard several of the Ear-Nose-and-Throat children were silently and busily digging out their satchels from the pile beneath the chestnut tree.

Parsnip instantly recognised his own schoolbag by its broken handle, as well as Turnip's satchel with its red buckles and straps. Everything was there: his textbooks and copybooks, his pencilbox with pencils and rubbers, his drawing pad, and even two apples. The latter proved especially handy, for he felt an urgent need to eat something.

In the empty classroom he saw Cockroach sitting at someone else's desk, gloomily surveying the blackboard with his head propped on his hand. It still bore the inscription: "NO MORE LESSONS!"

Parsnip and Turnip came in and took their seats at their desks.

"Why aren't you in your own classroom?" asked Parsnip.

"What difference does it make?" wheezed Cockroach, who still had a bad cold.

"This is our classroom," said Turnip quietly. "Go back to your own one!"

Cockroach made no objection. In silence, he stood up and slouched to the door. When the door banged shut behind him, Parsnip put his hand on Turnip's shoulder and said sadly:

"The teachers might at least have stayed on."

* * *

A big Paper Kite circled high in the sky, right above the Square of the Courageous Traveller. There was something hanging on its tail. The Kite alternately descended, then again swerved up, then drifted aside, the next moment returning to its former place. From the way it was behaving, it was clear that it intended to land and had chosen the city square for touchdown.

The first to notice it in the sky were the Ear-Nose-and-Throat children. Then the Roaches caught sight of it too. Soon the whole square was packed with children. Throwing back their heads, they stood gaping at the approaching Kite.

Not finding a vacant spot, the Paper Kite landed right on the bronze head of the Courageous Traveller. On landing, its tail slid down to the pedestal and touched the ground, and the Boy, who had flown in together with the Kite, at once found himself in a crowd of children.

"Who are you?" asked Pistol, cautiously touching the Boy's shoulder, as if to make sure he was real.

The Boy kept his composure. He stood on the ground, still holding the Kite's tail, and looked curiously at the children surrounding him.

"Who are you?" Pistol repeated.

"My name's Dreadful Child!" the Boy declared loudly.

A rumble of approval came from the crowd.

"What have you come here for?"



“What do you mean ‘what for’? I got tired of obeying Mother and flew away from her.”

“Well, here it happened the other way round,” said Pistol. “We were disobedient and they all ran away from us.”

“So you can do anything and nobody punishes you?”

“Yes, we can do all we want, but somehow we don’t want to do anything.”

“I do...” confessed the Boy. “I’m just dying for some chocolate ice-cream!”

Pistol paled and a wave of sickness swept over him.

“Listen, boys, I’m caught on something again,” came the voice of the Paper Kite from high up above them. “Please help me. Only be careful not to tear me.”

Cockroach and two of the Ear-Nose-and-Throat children climbed up the statue and untangled the Paper Kite from the top of the Courageous Traveller’s head. Caught by a gust of wind, the Paper Kite jerked the end of its tail from the Boy’s hands.

“I’ll take a bit of rest on one of those roof-tops,” cried the Kite and sailed slowly over the children’s heads.



* * *

Parsnip took the Boy to see Fantik.

“This boy was punished by his mother, and he flew away from her.”

“What do you mean ‘flew away’?”

“Quite simply. On a Paper Kite.”

“And where is the Kite?”

“Resting on a roof-top. They’ll be flying back soon.”

“Don’t they want to stay with us for a little?”

“I don’t think I like this place! I think I’ll fly back home to Mother!” said the Boy, pouting.

Fantik pondered. It was some time before he noticed that Turnip was making mysterious signs to him, winking first one eye, then the other. When he did notice it, he finally guessed why Parsnip had brought the Boy to him.

“Well, and right,” said Fantik, “if he doesn’t like it here, we won’t keep him. That’s his right. But maybe he will lend us his Kite for an hour or so? We’ll return it safe and sound to him. What do you say, Boy?”

“Well, first of all, he isn’t *my* Kite,” grumbled the Boy. “He’s his own!”

“All the better!” exclaimed Fantik, and winked back at Turnip. “Then we’ll go ourselves and ask him to do us a favour.”

* * *

Although it was tired, the Paper Kite acceded to Fantik's request: to find the parents' hiding place and take them a letter signed by all the children. The letter was composed by Fantik himself. All that remained now was to have it signed.

The first to sign the letter was Pistol, who was followed by all the other Ear-Nose-and-Throat brothers and sisters. Cockroach himself didn't even bother to read the letter through. He only asked who else had signed it and immediately inscribed it with a funny little flourish of his own: The Roaches, seeing this, didn't think long, and put down thirty of their own signatures, too. After them all the rest signed the letter as well. Those who couldn't yet read or write, made crosses.

When the letter was ready, they sealed it, just in case, in a waterproof envelope and fastened it securely to the Paper Kite's tail.

"Good luck to you! Came back with good news!" shouted Fantik as the Kite soared up above their heads.

"I'll find them, never you fear! They can't have gone very far, that I'm sure," came the Paper Kite's voice from a distance.

It circled over the city and vanished.

Fantik went home, where he found the Boy asleep in his little iron cot.

Now the Dreadful Children all sat at home, waiting anxiously.

* * *

The letter ended with a couplet:

*Mums and Dads, we're oh-so-sad:
Perhaps without us you feel bad?..*

When kind old Doctor Ear-Nose-and-Throat came up to these lines, he had to stop. He wiped his glasses, but it was no use—he couldn't read any further. His throat had gone dry with emotion and his heart stopped beating. He pulled himself together and his heart began working again but Globe the teacher still had to read the letter to the end. He put a lot of expression into his voice as he read the final lines of the message:

*Mums and Dads, we're oh-so-sad:
Perhaps without us you feel bad?..*

"What did I tell you?" the Doctor cried joyfully. "I foresaw it! They have learned their lesson well, and now we'll turn over a new leaf. Everything will be different, you'll see! What a wonderful couplet, by the way! So easy to remember!"

After that there was general merriment. Daddies, mummies, grannies and grandads joined hands, spinning round in a gay dance and singing:





*Mums and Dads, we're oh-so-sad:
Perhaps without us you feel bad?..*

They got so merry, in fact, that they actually began to feel like children again: they rolled head-over-heels in the grass, played hide-and-seek, and Globe the teacher behaved so naughtily that he quite forgot he was a teacher; running about with the Doctor, he tripped him over, and so successfully, that the Doctor turned a somersault and knocked Parsnip's and Turnip's Grandma off her feet, while she, in her turn, seized hold of Grandad so that they both rolled off down the hill in a great big ball.

All this was observed by the Paper Kite, who didn't wait for a reply to the letter; by now it was quite clear to him how it would all end. So he quietly took off over the tents and flew away. Fantik's assignment was fulfilled.

And now once again the children gathered in the city square.

Pistol and Cockroach sat on the broad shoulders of the Courageous Traveller, holding on to his bronze ears. Even Fantik was perched on top of the statue's head with opera-glasses in his hand.

Everyone was looking impatiently and hopefully at the cloudless sky.

"He's coming! He's coming!" yelled Pistol. "He's coming!" Fantik raised the opera-glasses to his eyes.

"It's only a jackdaw!"

Then a crow flew by and was also mistaken for the Kite in the distance. Then another jackdaw flew by.

But at last the long-awaited messenger appeared. He took them all by surprise, flying up not at all from the direction they had expected. He had been forced off course by the wind and therefore flew into the square from behind the clock-tower, almost getting its tail caught in the clock's hands.

"They're coming back! Get ready to welcome them!" the Kite cried, alighting on the roof of the tower.

"Hurra-a-ah! Hurra-a-ah!"

The delighted shouting began at the foot of the statue, and, getting louder and louder, rolled three times over the entire square.

"Let me kiss you!" shouted Fantik to the Kite, clapping his hands. The opera-glasses fell on the ground, but somehow remained unbroken.

* * *

"Kite! Kite!" called the Boy.

The square was empty. It was as if the wind had just blown everyone away.

The Paper Kite flapped its tail.

"Grab hold of the end!"

The Boy made a big jump and caught hold of the tail.

"Now clamber up!"

The Boy clambered up the tail, working with his hands and legs.

"Well done! Now hold on to me as before, and off we go!"

And they both flew off.

When they were already quite high, the Boy asked:

"Listen, Kite, you didn't like it there either, did you?"

"To tell you the truth, that sort of freedom wouldn't suit me!" answered the Paper Kite. "There's got to be at least some kind of order!"

* * *

Fantik tore from one end to the other of the city on his bike, giving orders and instructions and advice and checking things. The Dreadful Children were preparing a great welcome for their parents. Nobody knew for certain when they would appear, so they had to sweep the streets as quickly as possible, feed the birds in their cages and water the flowers in their pots, make beds, do the washing-up, and give themselves a thorough scrubbing—in a word, they had to do hundreds of things, and every single one of them was the most important.

The floor in SWEET-TOOTH the sweet shop shone like a mirror. Not a trace remained of the recent ice-cream battle on the tables, chairs, walls and windowsills.

The classrooms looked as clean and cozy as on the first day of the term.

"Welcome!" read a neat inscription on all the blackboards. The same word also adorned the big gates to the school grounds. Pistol and his team fussed about Musketeers Street, armed with several firehoses, washing the pictures they had drawn with such enthusiasm on the first day of Disobedience Holiday from the walls and fences.

"Down with war!" cried Pistol, aiming a strong jet of water at the charging tanks. These trickled from the fence in green streamlets to the pavement; the cannon disappeared as if they had never been there, and the rockets interrupted their flight, all washed off with water.

Of course, there was no denying that the Ear-Nose-and-Throat children were sorry to destroy the fruit of their imagination with their own hands, but Fantik had told them firmly:

"If we're to put the city in order, we must start with Musketeers Street. Otherwise, no one will understand you!"

"Why?" wondered Pistol, who had put the most effort into livening up the street.

“Why not? We made war look quite real—everything’s clear as clear can be!” And yet he preferred not to argue with Fantik: the children had all agreed that everyone should implicitly obey Fantik—the City Commandant.

* * *

At precisely midday the first column of parents marched on to the Square of the Courageous Traveller. Their children stood before them, lined up as if on parade, the boys combed and freshly washed, in well-pressed suits and polished shoes and the girls gaily dressed with bows in their well-brushed hair. Quiet and obedient, ready to fulfil any assignment or request. Exemplary, model children!

“They don’t look quite right somehow!” Doctor Ear-Nose-and-Throat stared at a small boy who had a wrinkled face looking like a baked apple and was standing a few steps ahead of the rest with a bunch of pansies in his hands.

The daddies, mummies, grannies and grandpas were bewildered. They had been expecting a very different welcome: stormy hugs and kisses, tears of joy, shouts of delight...

“What dreadful children they are!” whispered the Doctor. “Can they change so much in only three days? They’re just a lot of little old men and women.”

But here suddenly the little old man at their head waved his bunch of pansies; at his signal the ranks of model children broke and scattered amidst a deafening uproar. All children immediately began picking out their parents.

“Let me go! I’m not yours! I’m not yours!” shouted someone’s grandpa, beating off a rush of someone else’s grandchildren.



"She's not your Mummy! She's ours!" screamed Pistol, rescuing his frightened mother from the twins.

"That's not me! That's not me! I'm here! I'm here!" yelled Doctor Ear-Nose-and-Throat in an almost unrecognisable voice as he climbed onto the pedestal of the statue and waved his straw hat to attract the attention of his brood, who were in hot pursuit of someone else's father.

Buttons were lost, clothes crumpled, hair mussed, and more than one pair of spectacles was lost in the street scrimmage, but the daddies, mummies, grannies and grandpas were at last sorted out by their children and grandchildren and all finally went back to their homes.

Only Fantik went home alone. He lay down on his little cot and fell into the peaceful sleep of a man with a clear conscience. He dreamed he was offering Turnip a bunch of pansies.

* * *

Morning arrived.

Having lived through the three-day Disobedience Holiday, the city resumed its normal life. Traffic lights twinkled at crossings, pedestrians appeared in the streets, public transport began working, lovely fresh bread appeared at the baker's, fresh milk and yoghurt at the dairy, fresh vegetables and fruit at the greengrocer's, fresh meat at the butcher's and SWEET-TOOTH the sweet shop put ice-cream of every flavour and colour on display.

Hairdressers donned their smocks and stood by their chairs. Doctors put syringes and knee-hammers into their bags. The chemist opened his double-locked dangerous drug cabinet. The teachers sharpened their red pencils and the cooks their big kitchen knives.

"Good morning! And now for our daily exercises!" announced the radio.

A new day was beginning....

At ten o'clock, during form 1A's first lesson the first Very Poor was written smack into the book of a pupil sitting in the front row.

Towards one o'clock, the first



football smashed a window on the ground floor of 1, Musketeers Street.

"Here, Turnip, listen carefully!"

Parsnip whispered with a mysterious look into his sister's ear. "I've found a tube of yellow paint in Grandpa's chest of drawers. Why not paint Poots just once more?"

* * *

The key clicked in the lock, and Mother came into the room.

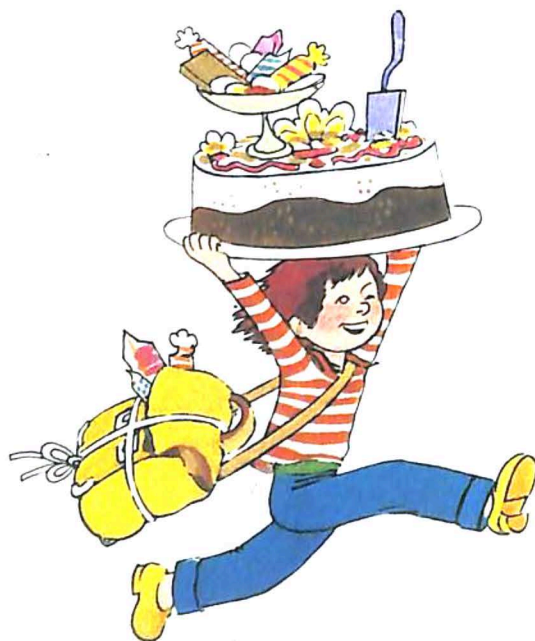
The Boy was still standing in the corner.

"All right, I'm forgiving you this time," said Mother in a gentle voice.

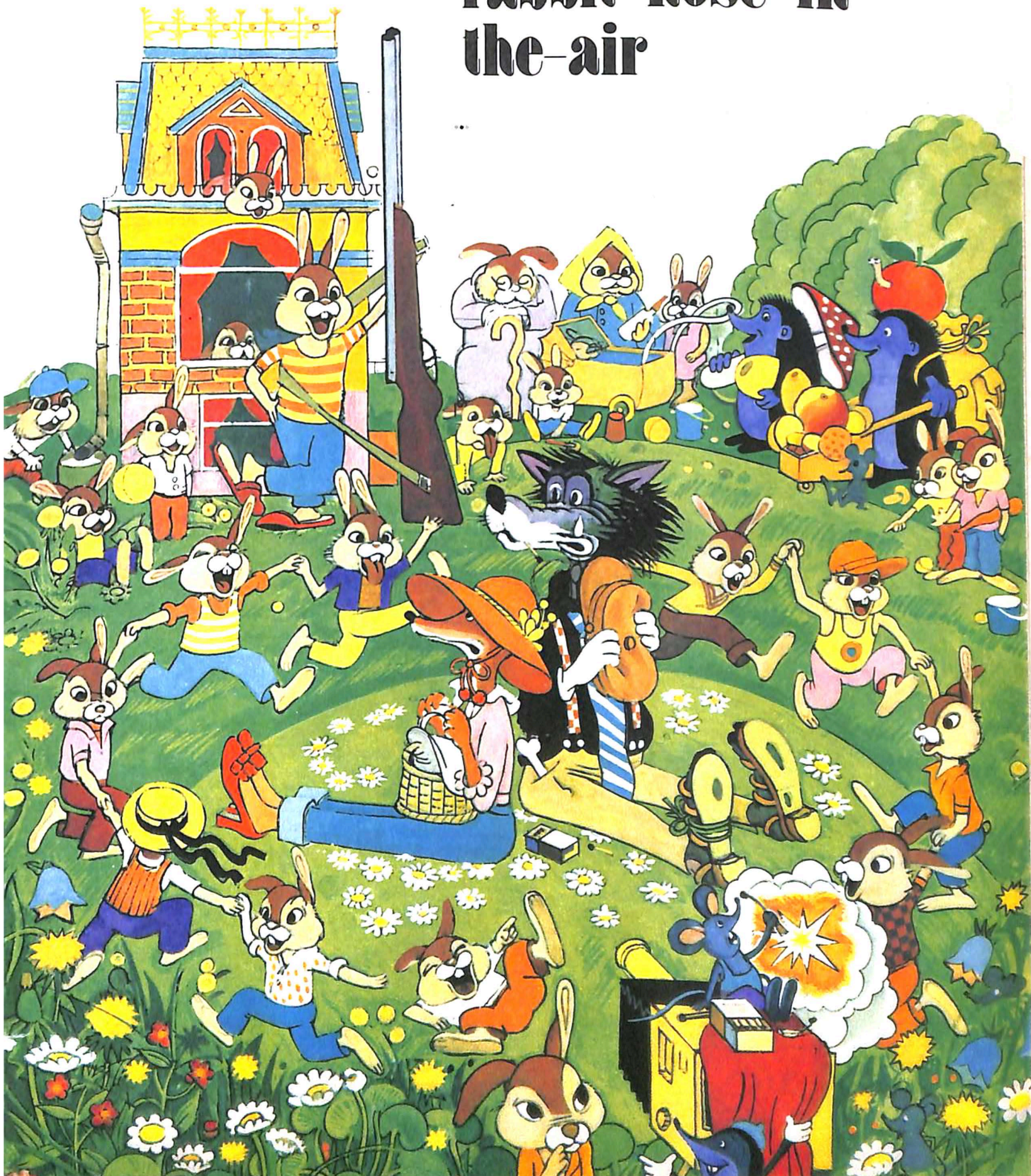
"Will you buy me some chocolate ice-cream then?" asked the Boy, squinting at the open window.

"If you promise to be good," said Mother.

Outside, a large handsome Kite was soaring freely over the houses. From time to time, gusts of wind drove it sideways, and it seemed it would at any moment lose balance and fall helplessly. But a small boy in the yard kept a wary eye on it. Not letting the Kite lose balance, he alternately let out more thread or wound it in on a spool. And no winds in the world could harm the Paper Kite because the boy was guiding it skilfully.



rabbit-nose-in- the-air



A FAIRY-TALE IN TWO ACTS AND WITH A PROLOGUE

THE CHARACTERS

Sorry Hunter
Rabbit Nose-in-the-Air
Worry-Furry, his wife
Papa Wise Rabbit
Mamma Wise Rabbit
First Bunny
Second Bunny
Third Bunny
Red Fox
Grey Wolf

PROLOGUE

It is a fine summer day, and the forest glade with its grassy knoll is sunny and warm. The morning dew has dried on the grass and on the two twin death-cups, their red caps very bright by the side of an old tree stump grown with thick green moss.

Red Fox appears in the glade. She sits back on her haunches and listens. The air throbs with the chirring of grasshoppers, the many-tuned voices of the songbirds and the cuckoo's monotonous call: "Cuckoo! Cuckoo! Cuckoo!"

RED FOX: I'm out of luck today. I've seen some of the dearest goslings and some of the sweetest ducklings and I set my heart on a nice fat chicken, but I dared not come near them. The dogs guarding that poultry-yard are terribly mean! I lay on my belly for two hours behind the barn, and all for nothing! Got myself soaked in dew, too! Wish I could catch me a rabbit or something for dinner. (*She smacks her lips hungrily and pricks up her ears.*)



Something rustles in the bushes. Rabbit Nose-in-the-Air darts out into the glade. He sees the Fox and freezes to the spot in horror. In her astonishment, the Fox, too, stays very still, looking fixedly at Nose-in-the-Air. Nose-in-the-Air comes to his senses and bolts back into the bushes. The Fox rushes after him, but thinks better of it and hides behind a shrub.

RED FOX: I think I'll watch for him here, behind this bush. I know a rabbit's ways! He's sure to come running back to this very glade after a time, and that's when I'll catch him! I would be a poor fox indeed if I let a rabbit outwit me.

Red Fox crouches behind the bush and waits for Nose-in-the Air to reappear. And Nose-in-the-Air circles the forest only to come scuttling back to the same spot again. He bounces out into the glade and sits back, straining his ears for a sound. The Fox is about to pounce upon him when something rustles in the bushes and Wise Rabbit appears. He tumbles head over heels down the knoll and comes to a stop beside his younger brother.

PAPA WISE RABBIT: Hello, Nose-in-the-Air! Why are you trembling?

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR: The Fox is after me!

PAPA WISE RABBIT: Don't be afraid. There're two of us and we're sure to outwit her. I'll help you.

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR: What can you do?

PAPA WISE RABBIT: She'll see us and run after us...

RED FOX (*behind the bush*): If I don't catch the first rabbit, I'll catch the second one!

PAPA WISE RABBIT: ...and grasp all is lose all!

The Fox makes a dash at the two rabbits who take to their heels. The glade is deserted but for the grasshoppers chirring in the grass, the songbirds twittering and the cuckoo calling again and again "Cuckoo! Cuckoo!"

Suddenly there is a crackle of twigs beneath someone's feet, the bushes are pushed aside and Sorry Hunter strides out into the glade. A gun is slung over his shoulder and a game-bag is hanging at his side. He is singing a song.

SORRY HUNTER

With gun and bag through glen and grove,
Through forest, wood and field I rove,
A-hunting high, a-hunting low,
A-hunting do I go!

I aim, I fire, my gun goes "pop!"
I pray the birds would only stop.
But in reply I hear—"Good-bye!"
As fast away they fly.

I have no luck, but don't complain—
In spring or fall, in sun or rain,
A-hunting high, a-hunting low,
A-hunting do I go!

Bang-bang! I fire away,
I never waste a day!
And though no game I meet,
I'm always on my feet.

I scoff at heat and frost
And keep my fingers crossed,



I hunt and hunt in vain,
But always try again!

(*Sorry Hunter sits down on the stump. He heaves a sigh.*) I don't think I've ever met with such bad luck before.

Through mud and mire I waded,
The neighbouring hills I raided,
The thorns they pricked me,
And the birds they tricked me,
I'm ready to drop,
I'm so knocked up,

and all for nothing! I'll have to go home empty-handed again. If ever there was a sorry hunter, I am that hunter! (*Looks around him.*) A nice little glade! I don't believe there's a better one in the whole forest. I think I'll lie down and have a little nap. And then we'll see what we shall see.

Sorry Hunter leans his gun against the stump and settles himself on the ground. He lies down on his back, covers his face with his cap and soon begins to snore. Unseen by him, two rabbits tiptoe out into the glade from a growth of shrubs. They are Nose-in-the-Air and his wife Worry-Furry.

WORRY-FURRY: I simply can't get over it! I'm trembling all over. If it weren't for your brother you wouldn't be here now. You said yourself Red Fox almost caught you by the ears.

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR: Almost doesn't count! I can take care of myself.

WORRY-FURRY: Why must you brag! You'd never have escaped alive if it weren't for Wise Rabbit, and don't you forget it!

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR

What do you know about it! Why, I...
I need no help for I
Am bold as I am sly!

WORRY-FURRY

Don't boast. I sadly fear
You'll come to grief, my dear!

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR

I'll lead Red Fox a race
And land her in disgrace!

WORRY-FURRY

Hush now! The Fox is near,
And she might overhear!

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR

Oh, nonsense, I don't care,
To touch me she won't dare!

WORRY-FURRY

Than you, Red Fox is slyer,
You mustn't play with fire!

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR

I wish you'd go away,
You scold me night and day!

WORRY-FURRY

Now watch your manners, do,
I'm quite ashamed of you!

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR: Look! Who's that?

WORRY-FURRY: It's a hunter and he's asleep. Let's get away from here before we land in trouble!

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR: Look! A gun!

WORRY-FURRY: Let's go, Nose-in-the-Air. What do you want with a gun?

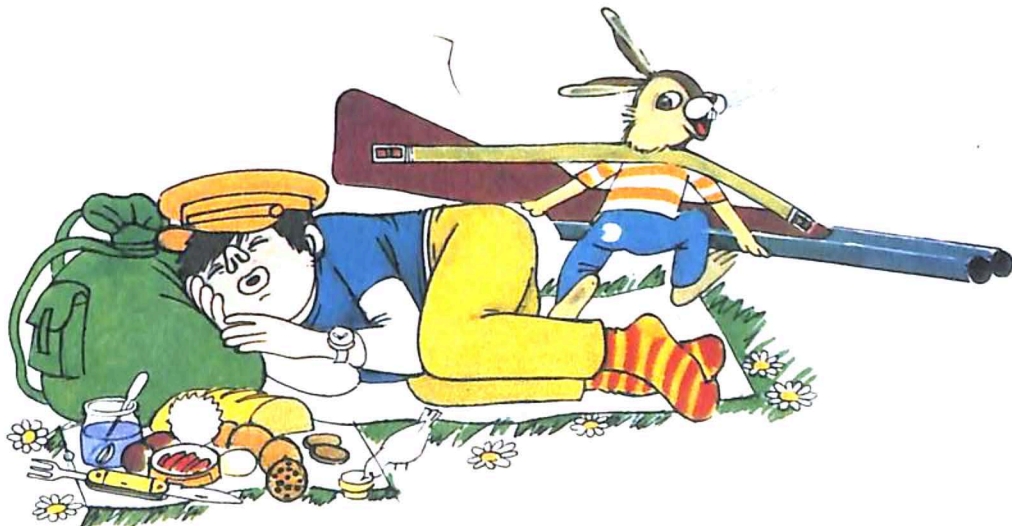
NOSE-IN-THE-AIR: Wait! Wait a minute! Don't you understand anything?

WORRY-FURRY: What's come over you, Nose-in-the-Air? You must be mad! You only got away from the Fox by the skin of your teeth, and now you want to go and be shot to death!

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR: I know what I'm doing!

Nose-in-the-Air steps over the legs of the sleeping Sorry Hunter, stretches out a paw, snatches up the gun and is off in a flash with Worry-Furry at his heels. Sorry Hunter turns over on his side and goes on snoring louder than ever.

CURTAIN



ACT ONE

Red Fox's house in the forest. The house has a porch and a large window with carved shutters. Inside there is a bed with a mound of pillows, a Russian stove, a table by the window and the portraits of Grandpa Reynard and Grandma Vixen on the wall. Red Fox has a white apron on and is bustling about in the room. She brushes the crumbs off the table with a feather duster and waits for the fire in the stove to flare up so that she can boil some water. She is singing a song.

RED FOX

Today is quite a special day—
My birthday, friends, you see.
Grey Wolf is sure to come and pay
His compliments to me.

A nice fat chicken I will fry
And serve it on a tray,
With merry song Grey Wolf and I
Will finish off the day.

We two are friends, I'll have you know,
And I will not conceal—
Together he and I, we go
To plunder and to steal.

My birthday feast, I do declare,
Would please Grey Wolf no end,
If only I could catch a pair
Of rabbits for my friend!



The fire in the stove flares up. Red Fox puts a pot of water into the stove, takes off her apron, picks up her bag and steps out on to the porch.

RED FOX: I think I'll go behind the poultry-yard and hide in the nettles there. Perhaps I can catch a chicken napping and carry it off! *(She slips the hook on the latch and trots off.)*

Two rabbits edge out into the clearing—Nose-in-the-Air with the gun and, just behind him, Worry-Furry with a basket over her paw.

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR *(turning to look back)*: What are you trailing behind me for?

WORRY-FURRY: I don't like this, Nose-in-the-Air, I'm afraid things might turn out badly.

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR: Are you going to nag again?

WORRY-FURRY: You never listen to anyone!

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR: Why should I? I've got a head of my own on my shoulders, haven't I!

WORRY-FURRY: One head's fine, but two are better.

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR: You and your fears! Stop trembling! You forget I have a gun. Be brave and follow me!

WORRY-FURRY: Oh, all right!

Nose-in-the-Air scrambles up the steps to the porch of Red Fox's house and sees that the hook is on the latch.

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR: No one's at home. All the better. There'll be less of a fuss.

Nose-in-the-Air lifts the hook off the latch and whisks inside.

WORRY-FURRY: Well?

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR: Come along, don't be afraid!

Worry-Furry hops up the steps and into the house.

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR: This is where we're going to live from now on!

WORRY-FURRY: I smell a fox.

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR: Let's open the window and air the room! (*He throws the window open.*)

WORRY-FURRY: How're we going to live here?

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR: Never mind, you'll get used to it!

WORRY-FURRY (*peeping into the stove*): She's put water on to boil. Going to be back soon, I suppose.

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR: Well, don't waste time. Put on Red Fox's apron and chop up some cabbage for soup.

Worry-Furry puts on the apron, dips into her basket for a cabbage head and begins chopping it up for soup. Nose-in-the-Air walks up and down the room, looking to all sides of him. He sees the portraits of Grandpa Reynard and Grandma Vixen on the wall, tears them down and throws them into the stove. Then, taking pictures of his own relatives out of the basket, he hangs them up over the bed.

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR: Now that looks much better!

WORRY-FURRY: Oh! Oh! Who has ever heard of a rabbit living in a fox-hole?

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR: And who has ever heard of a rabbit roaming the woods with a gun? Tell me that!

WORRY-FURRY: Why can't we go on living as we always have, like all normal rabbits?



NOSE-IN-THE-AIR: Because I don't want to live like them! Why should I? I'm stronger than anyone in the forest now! I got this gun and I chased Red Fox out of her house.

WORRY-FURRY: No, you didn't, not yet. She'll be back any minute.

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR: Hee-hee-hee! Watch me tell her a thing or two!

WORRY-FURRY: Wait a minute! I think I hear someone coming. (*She cocks an ear.*)

Red Fox comes striding through the forest. She has a rooster in her bag and is singing a song.

RED FOX

Though I really hate to brag,
There's a rooster in my bag.
And Grey Wolf, as I can tell,
Will enjoy him very well!

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR (*listening*): Red Fox! I'm going to give her a nice warm welcome!

WORRY-FURRY: I'm shaking like a leaf! What's going to happen now?

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR: Move over. I need room if I'm to fire this gun!

Red Fox comes up to her house.

RED FOX: I wonder who opened my door?

Nose-in-the-Air appears on the porch with the gun hidden behind his back.

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR: I did! Welcome home, Red Fox!

RED FOX: Look who's here! What are you doing here, Squint-Eyes? Wasn't it you I nearly caught by the ears yesterday?

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR: That was yesterday! From now on you'll be the one to run from me!

RED FOX: We'll see! We'll see! (*She smacks her lips.*)

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR: What are you smacking your lips for?

RED FOX: Because I'm going to eat you up right now!

Red Fox rushes up on to the porch. Nose-in-the-Air raises his gun and takes aim.

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR: Step back or I'll riddle you as full of holes as a sieve!

Startled, Red Fox draws back.

RED FOX: Where did you get that gun? Stop pointing it at me!

Nose-in-the-Air lowers the gun.

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR: Scared, aren't you? Well, well! Who's afraid of who now?

RED FOX: What does this mean?

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR: Just that we're here and we're going to stay here!

RED FOX: How can you do that? It's my house!

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR: It used to be, you mean.

RED FOX: But where am I going to live?

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR: That's your business!

RED FOX: But today's my birthday.

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR: Many happy returns!

RED FOX: I've invited Grey Wolf to have dinner with me.

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR: Well, you'll just have to apologise to him.

RED FOX (*sweetly*): Do let me in, Nose-in-the-Air! We'll live in my house together, I promise never to touch you.

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR: I know what your promises are worth! You'd better go before I get real mad. I can't waste time talking to you, I want my dinner. My cabbage soup'll get cold!

RED FOX: Oh, very well. You'll regret this, Lop-Ears!

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR: Get away! Shoo! I'm not the least bit afraid of you!

Exit Red Fox. Nose-in-the-Air sits down on the porch, placing the gun between his paws. He sings a song.

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR

One, two, three—my count is done—
Here's a rabbit with a gun.
Suddenly a fox runs up.
And the rabbit aims—Pop! Pop!
Oh! Oh! Oh! The fox is dead,
He has shot her through the head!



WORRY-FURRY (*peeping out through the window*): Has she gone?

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR: Yes, and so fast she forgot to cover up her tracks! There's no one in the forest stronger than me now. I can even chase the Wolf out of his den, if I so choose! And the Bear out of his lair! And ... and go to Africa to hunt lions afterwards!

WORRY-FURRY: I do hope everything turns out all right. You were so rude to her!

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR: Rude? Hee-hee-hee! She ought to be grateful that I didn't shoot her on the spot! Hee-hee-hee! She'll know better next time than to try and frighten us rabbits!

WORRY-FURRY: The soup's ready. Let's eat.

Nose-in-the-Air comes inside the house, sits down at the table and takes up a spoon.

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR: The magpie saw me carrying this gun, so everyone'll be sure to know by evening that we're living in Red Fox's house now. They'll burst with envy! Did you see how scared the Fox looked when I pointed the gun at her? Hee-hee-hee!

Nose-in-the-Air and Worry-Furry are sitting at the table and eating their cabbage soup. Papa Wise Rabbit, Mamma Wise Rabbit and their two Bunnies come out of the forest carrying a head of cabbage and a bunch of carrots.

PAPA WISE RABBIT (*in a whisper*): Don't make a sound! (*He pricks up his ears.*)

FIRST BUNNY: I'm scared, Pop!

SECOND BUNNY: I'm scared, Mom!

MAMMA WISE RABBIT: I'm scared myself!

PAPA WISE RABBIT (*sniffing the air*): I think I smell a rabbit! We're safe! Come along, children!

Wise Rabbit goes up on to the porch and raps at the door.

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR: Who's there?

PAPA WISE RABBIT: Open the door! It's us!

WORRY-FURRY: It's Brother's voice!

MAMMA WISE RABBIT: It's us! Open up!

WORRY-FURRY: It's Sister's voice!

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR: Ah, so they've heard about us!

Worry-Furry opens the door and lets in Wise Rabbit and his family.

PAPA WISE RABBIT: Hello, Brother! Hello, Sister!

BUNNIES: Hello, Uncle! Hello, Auntie!

PAPA WISE RABBIT: I'm glad you got the gun, Brother! Good for you! Congratulations!

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR: Thanks. That is, if you really mean it.

PAPA WISE RABBIT: Where's the gun? May I look at it?

FIRST BUNNY: Look, Pop, look! A gun!

SECOND BUNNY: Look, Mom! A gun!

WORRY-FURRY: Don't come near it!

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR: You mustn't touch the gun on any account!

PAPA WISE RABBIT: Is it real?

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR: Can't you see? Does it look like a toy?

MAMMA WISE RABBIT: How nice it is here! And what a lovely bed! Such soft pillows! (*She touches the pillows.*) Feathers and down!

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR: It's our bed now!

MAMMA WISE RABBIT: What a lovely table! And such pretty little stools!

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR: They're our stools now!

PAPA WISE RABBIT: Are you thinking of settling here for good?

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR: I don't know. I may be moving to the Bear's lair for the winter.

MAMMA WISE RABBIT: And all the rabbits say that we're going to live together now because we only have one gun!

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR: Who cares what they say! It's my gun and I will take it where I please!

PAPA WISE RABBIT: Aren't you going to protect us?

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR: How did you live when I had no gun?

PAPA WISE RABBIT: You know how. You were with us then.

MAMMA WISE RABBIT: It was a sad life. We were always afraid that Red Fox might get us.

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR: Well, I'm through with that kind of life. For good.

PAPA WISE RABBIT: Oh, I see. Now that you have the gun you don't want to have anything to do with the rest of us! You were willing enough to share the bad, but not the good!

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR: What do you expect me to do—keep guard over you with my gun? There's many of you and just one of me!

MAMMA WISE RABBIT: Well, I never!

PAPA WISE RABBIT: What a way to behave, Nose-in-the-Air! If it was I who had the gun I'd never be so selfish. You think only of yourself. It's disgraceful!

The Bunnies start a scuffle on the floor.

FIRST BUNNY: He's nipped my ears, Mom!

SECOND BUNNY: He's biting me, Pop!

MAMMA WISE RABBIT: Stop it, children, or I'll call the Fox!

PAPA WISE RABBIT: Hush! Grey Wolf's coming!

The Bunnies stop fighting and fall silent. Grey Wolf is making his way through the forest to Red Fox's house, singing a song as he goes.

GREY WOLF

For breakfast at the start of day
I had a lamb that came my way.
He was a rather sturdy chap,
So after that I took a nap.
I lay beneath a shady lime
And slept till way past dinner-time.
I'm very late and hungry, too.
Dear Mistress Fox, forgive me, do!



I have a splendid appetite,
I'll eat whatever is in sight,
I'll swallow what you serve me
whole—

Horns, hoofs, and tail, and skin
and all.

I'll eat a hare, a calf, a boar,
And when I finish, ask for more.
Forgive me, do, for being late,
I'm sorry that I made you wait!

Grey Wolf goes up to Red Fox's house. He stops short.

GREY WOLF: I smell a rabbit! I do believe Red Fox has made us some roast rabbit for dinner. How nice! I love roast rabbit. Open the door, Red Fox! It's me, Grey Wolf!

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR (*defiantly*): Red Fox is not here! Go away, Grey Wolf!

GREY WOLF: What's this? A fox piping like a rabbit! How well she does it, too! Open the door, Mistress Fox!

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR: There's no fox here!

GREY WOLF: Who is, then?

FIRST BUNNY: We are, the rabbits!

GREY WOLF: Are there many of you?

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR: Yes, and one of us has a gun!

GREY WOLF: Ho-ho-ho! I'll gobble up you rabbits and have your gun for dessert!



Grey Wolf starts breaking in the door. The Bunnies squeal, the lady rabbits tremble with fear, and Nose-in-the-Air throws open the window, leans out of it with his gun and points it at Grey Wolf.

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR: Let's see you do it!

At that moment a Third Bunny bounces out of the forest into the glade. Seeing the Wolf trying to break into the house, he hides behind a tree, more dead than alive.

GREY WOLF (*to Nose-in-the-Air*): Put down your gun, you!

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR: I will not! Did you want one of us?

GREY WOLF: No, I want Red Fox. Stop pointing that gun at me, please!

Nose-in-the-Air lowers the gun.

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR: Now you're talking! Red Fox is not here. She doesn't live here any more.

GREY WOLF: But she invited me to dinner today. It's her birthday.

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR: I know, I know. She asked me to tell you that the party's off. Come next year at the same time.

GREY WOLF: Ugh! Don't think you will escape from me, Squint-Eyes!

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR: We'll see about that. You'd better go while the going's good! And you may thank me that I didn't take a crack at you. You'd have looked fine with a hole through your hide! Get away from here!

Grey Wolf turns and stumps slowly away into the forest. He keeps looking back and snapping his jaws. The Third Bunny scurries up on to the porch and drums away at the door.

THIRD BUNNY: Open up! Open up! Auntie! Uncle! Open up! It's me, your little nephew! Open the door, quick! I'm afraid Grey Wolf might eat me up! Open the door!

Worry-Furry opens the door, lets in her nephew and hurriedly shuts the door after him.

THIRD BUNNY: Hello!

WORRY-FURRY: Hello!

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR (*very glum*): If this goes on, all the rabbits in this forest will be coming to our house. I won't know where to put my gun, we'll be so cramped.

PAPA WISE RABBIT: Don't worry! They won't come! And we're leaving right now!

MAMMA WISE RABBIT: Come, children!

PAPA WISE RABBIT: Let's go!

Exit Wise Rabbit and his family. Only the Third Bunny is left behind. He sits shivering in a corner. As soon as they have left, Nose-in-the-Air smites his forehead with his paw as though remembering something. He hurries out on to the porch.

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR (*loudly*): Hey, you, come back!

MAMMA WISE RABBIT: It's brother calling us.

Wise Rabbit listens.

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR (*loudly*): Hey, you, come back!

PAPA WISE RABBIT: He's repented. Must be thoroughly ashamed of himself. I think we ought to go back.

The rabbits retrace their steps.





NOSE-IN-THE-AIR (*to Wise Rabbit*): Look here, I quite forgot! Bring me some fresh cabbage tomorrow morning. The more the better! I'm not going out for my food any more.

Wise Rabbit wants to reply, but is too overcome to speak.

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR: If you bring me cabbage every morning, I will tell Grey Wolf and Red Fox not to touch you.

PAPA WISE RABBIT (*spluttering in his indignation*): Well, of all the—

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR: Don't bother to thank me. As for the cabbage, I like it fresh. And please choose the largest heads. What you brought today doesn't deserve the name of cabbage!

PAPA WISE RABBIT: What a brazen fellow you are, Brother! I've never met a more shameless rabbit! We never had anyone to match you in our family. Who you take after is beyond me.

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR: Ha-ha-ha! You ought to thank me that I speak to you at all!

PAPA WISE RABBIT: For shame! For shame!

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR: Well, if you won't, you won't. Suit yourselves! There's nothing more I can do. You'd better go.

PAPA WISE RABBIT: See that you don't regret this! It was I that got you out of trouble, wasn't it? And you never can tell what's in store for you.

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR: Oh, yes, I can. Get out and stay out!

The rabbits leave.

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR (*under his breath*): That wise brother of mine croaks like a crow! "You never can tell what's in store for you!" I can, too! I know everything! (*To the Third Bunny.*) Why are you here? Why didn't you go with the rest?

THIRD BUNNY (*startled*): Where can I go! Mummy and Daddy told me to spend the night with you, in Red Fox's house. They were planning to raid the vegetable gardens tonight and there was no one to leave me with.

WORRY-FURRY (*to Nose-in-the-Air*): Let him stay for the night.

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR: Oh, all right. You can sleep on the floor behind the stove.

THIRD BUNNY: Thank you.

The Third Bunny lies down on the bare floor behind the stove and Nose-in-the-Air gets into Red Fox's bed. He lies back on the pillows, covers himself with the quilt, yawns and stretches. He looks very snug and comfortable.

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR: I'm sleepy!

WORRY-FURRY: Wouldn't it be terrible if Grey Wolf were to burst in here? Why, he'd gobble up all of us.

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR: You're forgetting the gun.

WORRY-FURRY: What if Red Fox climbs in through the window in the middle of the night?

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR: I have a gun, haven't I? (*Yawns.*)

WORRY-FURRY: Red Fox and Grey Wolf might get together and call Big Bear in to help. What will we do then?

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR: You're forgetting the gun. (*Yawns.*) And please let's not talk. I'm sleepy.

WORRY-FURRY: Why did you have to go and quarrel with your family? It's just too bad. You don't even know how to use the gun!

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR: I know how to do everything!

Nose-in-the-Air turns over to his side and snores away. Worry-Furry, too, dozes off. And Bunny behind the stove listens for a moment, gets up very quietly, takes the gun and looks it over.

CURTAIN



ACT TWO

It is very quiet in the forest. Day is just breaking. All of the forest inhabitants are still asleep. Red Fox's house is wrapt in slumber—Nose-in-the-Air and Worry-Furry are sleeping peacefully. Something rustles in the bushes and Papa Wise Rabbit bolts out into the glade followed by the Third Bunny. They stop to shake the dew off their fur.

THIRD BUNNY: The gun is not loaded, Uncle! I've seen it with my own eyes! I'm not lying, honestly I'm not!

PAPA WISE RABBIT: Hm-m-m... If what you say is true, then the gun's no better than an ordinary stick.

THIRD BUNNY: I swear it's true!

PAPA WISE RABBIT: Hm-m-m... Nose-in-the-Air is in a fine fix! You haven't told anyone but me about it, have you?

THIRD BUNNY: No! I haven't told a soul!

PAPA WISE RABBIT: Hm-m-m.... You're sure the gun's not loaded, I suppose?

THIRD BUNNY: Yes. Quite sure.

Mamma Wise Rabbit and the two Bunnies dart out into the glade. Mamma Wise Rabbit is very tired and quite out of breath.

MAMMA WISE RABBIT: They're still asleep? We must wake them up at once! Red Fox and Grey Wolf know about the gun already!

PAPA WISE RABBIT: How did they find out?

THIRD BUNNY: I didn't tell them, honestly I didn't.

MAMMA WISE RABBIT: The magpie told them. (*To the Third Bunny.*) When you're telling something you don't want anyone to overhear, you mustn't forget that the trees have ears. We've got to wake them before it's too late!

PAPA WISE RABBIT: Of course. Though Nose-in-the-Air doesn't deserve it. That stuck-up little braggart!

MAMMA WISE RABBIT: I know. He was terrible yesterday. But not to warn him now would be too cruel. Red Fox and Grey Wolf may be here any minute.

FIRST BUNNY: I'm scared, Mom!

SECOND BUNNY: I'm scared, Pop!

MAMMA WISE RABBIT: I'm scared myself!

THIRD BUNNY (*to the First and the Second Bunnies*): I found out that the gun is not loaded first, so there!

PAPA WISE RABBIT: We must hurry if we don't want to be too late!

The howling of a wolf is heard in the forest. The rabbits hide behind bushes and trees. Red Fox comes out into the glade followed by Grey Wolf. They steal up to the Fox's house.

RED FOX (*in a whisper*): So the dear ones are fast asleep.

GREY WOLF: Yes, and having pleasant dreams, ha-ha-ha!

RED FOX: S-sh... Not so loud!

GREY WOLF: Wait till I get my hands on that rabbit. I'll make short work of him! I'll show him how to point his gun at me!

RED FOX: And I'll show him how to chase me out of my house!

GREY WOLF: I know what I'll do to him—I'll eat him up!

RED FOX: No, I'll do that!

GREY WOLF: If I could only get one good bite at him!

RED FOX: Oh, I'll leave a bite for you, Grey Wolf!

GREY WOLF: Good! And remember—I like the fat parts best.

RED FOX: We'll divide Worry-Furry up between us.

GREY WOLF: All right! What are we waiting for?

RED FOX: Don't rush. We'll play a little joke on them first, pretend we don't know anything about the gun.

GREY WOLF: That's a good idea, Red Fox!

RED FOX: Of course it is! And now you hide behind the house and watch me. Come out when I call you!

GREY WOLF: Oh, all right, all right! I'm going to enjoy this! Of course, we could eat them up at once, but I don't mind having a little fun first.

RED FOX: We can always eat them up. The gun's not loaded.

GREY WOLF: What are we going to do if it is?

RED FOX: The magpie heard every word that foolish Bunny said to Wise Rabbit.

GREY WOLF: You can't trust a magpie too far!

RED FOX: Run and hide yourself. I'm going to wake them up, and then we'll see.

Grey Wolf hides behind the house. Red Fox whisks up on to the porch and knocks at the door.

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR (sleepily): Who's there?

RED FOX (softly): It's me, Red Fox!

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR: What do you want?

RED FOX: I want to speak to you.

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR: Come over later! I'm sleepy!

RED FOX: I'm sorry to wake you, but I've come on business.



Nose-in-the-Air goes up to the window, the gun in his paws. He yawns sleepily.

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR: What kind of business?

RED FOX: There's something I want to ask of you!

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR: What is it?

RED FOX: You mustn't be cross with me, Nose-in-the-Air! You won't be, will you? Promise!

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR (*stretching*): I promise.

RED FOX: You chased me out of my house, didn't you?

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR: I did. So what?

RED FOX: Nothing. I can't do anything about it and, besides, I don't really mind. You're stronger than me, so the house is yours by rights. It's warm and there's plenty of light and the bed is nice and soft.

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR: Yes. Very soft. I've had a good night's sleep.

RED FOX: I'm glad to hear it. I won't be sleeping in it any more, so it's a pleasure to have you enjoy it!

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR: Why did you have to come and wake me so early, Red Fox? I'm very sleepy.

(*Yawns.*) What do you want?

RED FOX: I want my things.

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR: What things?

RED FOX: Mine. Give them to me, Nose-in-the-Air. You don't need them. You'll get some of your own in time.

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR: I don't understand. What do you want me to give you?

RED FOX: Nothing much. Just my grandma's and grandpa's portraits that are hanging on the wall.

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR: I don't have them.

RED FOX: You don't?

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR: No. I burned them.

RED FOX: Oh! That's too bad!

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR: I'm terribly sorry! If I had known you wanted them, I'd never have done that. Is there anything else?

RED FOX: Yes. I'd like to have my pillows back.

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR: Oh, no! What'll I sleep on?



RED FOX: Well, can't you just give me one small one? When will I ever gather enough down for a pillow again?

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR: Oh, all right. You can have it.

Nose-in-the-Air disappears inside the house. Grey Wolf peeps out from behind it.

GREY WOLF: Is it time?

RED FOX: No, wait! He's coming out himself.

Grey Wolf ducks behind the house again. Nose-in-the-Air opens the window and throws Red Fox a small pillow.

RED FOX: Thank you, Nose-in-the-Air. I'll never forget this.

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR: I should hope not. We rabbits have kind hearts.

RED FOX: Not all of you, I'll wager! I hear you threw your relatives out of the house the other day, with night drawing on, too!

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR (*crossly*): Was there anything else you wanted?

RED FOX (*sweetly*): No. Nothing else. Who am I to judge you? You know what to do!

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR: That's better.

RED FOX: Frankly, Nose-in-the-Air, I like you!

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR: You do?

RED FOX: You're brave and smart too. Many's the time I was after you, but you always managed to slip away! I've never seen a smarter rabbit!

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR (*chuckling*): Where do you get your ideas?

RED FOX: There's not a rabbit anywhere to compare with you.

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR: Don't I know it!

RED FOX: You're stronger than anyone in this whole forest!

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR: Wait a minute. I'll just come out on to the porch. Then we can talk.

Nose-in-the Air vanishes inside the house. Grey Wolf peeps out from behind it.

GREY WOLF: Well?

RED FOX: Not yet, not yet! Another moment!

Grey Wolf ducks behind the house. Nose-in-the Air trips out on to the porch. He is holding his gun.

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR: Well, Red Fox, I can't say that you're terribly smart, but I like you, too. Let's be friends.

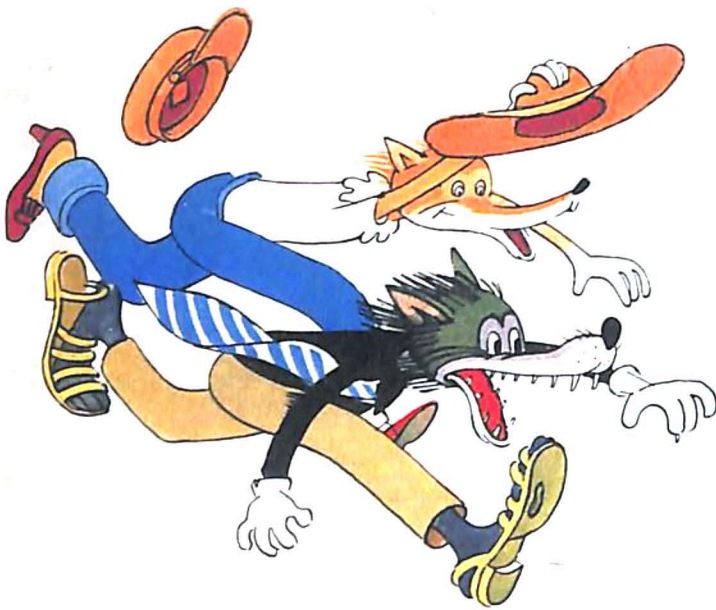
RED FOX: That would be nice!

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR: Would you like to work for me?

RED FOX: Will you keep me very busy? What do you want me to do?

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR: Nothing to talk about! As





soon as you get up in the morning, you'll draw some water from the well and sit down and rest. Then you'll bring in some wood and sweep the floor and sit down and rest. Then you'll set the table and wash the dishes and sit down and rest. Then you'll launder the linen and dig the beds in my vegetable garden and sit down and rest again. And that's all. You'll be sitting there resting all day long.

RED FOX: What will I get in return?

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR (*after thinking it over*): I promise never to shoot you!

RED FOX: Good. That's settled. And have you any work for Grey Wolf to do?

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR: I'll think of something. Oh, yes. He can guard my house. I'll keep him on a chain like a watchdog.

Grey Wolf can hardly contain himself at the words. He gnashes his teeth and makes as if to pounce upon Nose-in-the-Air.

RED FOX: What will you give us to eat?

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR: What would you like?

RED FOX: Roast rabbit!

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR: Now, now!

RED FOX: I won't work for you unless you promise to give me fresh rabbit for dinner every day.

Red Fox steals closer and closer to Nose-in-the-Air. Nose-in-the-Air draws back, raises his gun and takes aim.

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR: That's enough! I don't care for such talk.

RED FOX: Well, Nose-in-the-Air, show me how your gun works.

Nose-in-the-Air presses the trigger, there's a click, but the gun does not go off. Grey Wolf rushes out from behind the house and up on to the porch.

GREY WOLF: Go on, shoot! I think I'm going to eat you up right now.

RED FOX: No, I'm going to eat him up!

GREY WOLF: No, you are not!

Nose-in-the-Air bolts into the house while Grey Wolf and Red Fox stand in each other's way in the door, arguing.

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR: Help!

WORRY-FURRY! Help! Help!

Wise Rabbit and his family peep out from behind the bushes and trees, but are afraid to approach.

RED FOX: I'm going to eat up the rabbit!

GREY WOLF: No, I am!

RED FOX: It's my house!

GREY WOLF: But you invited me to dinner.

Grey Wolf and Red Fox burst into the house together. All hell breaks loose inside. Everything is turned topsy-turvy. The terrified squeals of Nose-in-the-Air and Worry-Furry mingle with the howling of Grey Wolf and the cries of Red Fox. The gun flies out of the window and, as it lands on the grass, Nose-in-the-Air and Worry-Furry suddenly bound out, one after the other. This is the chance Wise Rabbit and his family have been waiting for. Without stopping to think, they rush to the house, put down the hook on the latch and close the shutters with a bang. Grey Wolf and Red Fox are trapped. They hammer away at the window and try to burst the door open, but to no avail. As for our little braggart Nose-in-the-Air and his wife Worry-Furry, they sit huddled together on the ground, quaking with fear.

PAPA WISE RABBIT: Good! Very good! Now they'll never get out!

GREY WOLF (*in piteous tones*): Please open the door!

RED FOX (*in piteous tones*): Please open the window!

PAPA WISE RABBIT: Oh, no!... what shall we do with them?

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR: Give 'em a good hiding!

WORRY-FURRY: Thank you, Brother dear! Thank you, Sister dear!

Thank you, nephews! You saved our lives!

PAPA WISE RABBIT: Don't mention it! We're always glad to help.

WORRY-FURRY (*to Nose-in-the-Air*): If it weren't for them, we'd be lost!

GREY WOLF: What are you going to do with us?

RED FOX: What are you going to do with us?

PAPA WISE RABBIT: We'll put our heads together and decide. What are we going to do with them indeed?

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR: I'd ... I'd ... I'd...

WORRY-FURRY: I wouldn't say anything if I were you. They'll decide this without you.

The First Bunny raises his paw.

PAPA WISE RABBIT: You have something to say? Speak up!

FIRST BUNNY: We could starve them to death.

Grey Wolf and Red Fox cry out in fear. The Second Bunny raises his paw.

PAPA WISE RABBIT: Well, what do you say?

SECOND BUNNY: Brother's right. Let's starve them to death.

Grey Wolf and Red Fox cry even louder. The Third Bunny raises his paw.

PAPA WISE RABBIT: And what do you say?



THIRD BUNNY: I think we ought to shoot them!

PAPA WISE RABBIT: That's out of the question. The gun's not loaded.
Where is it, by the way?

Nose-in-the-Air picks up the gun and hands it to Papa Wise Rabbit.

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR: Here it is. I hate to even look at it.

Wise Rabbit takes the gun and examines it carefully. He opens the lock, peers into the barrel and sees that the gun is loaded.

PAPA WISE RABBIT (*in surprise*): What's this? The gun's loaded!

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR: Wh ... wh ... what did you say?

MAMMA WISE RABBIT: Are you sure?

WORRY-FURRY: But it can't be!

BUNNIES: We want to have a look! We want to have a look!

PAPA WISE RABBIT: Go ahead!

All press round Papa Wise Rabbit to get a better look at the gun.

WORRY-FURRY: I don't know the first thing about guns!

MAMMA WISE RABBIT: Nor I.

BUNNIES: It's loaded! It's loaded!

PAPA WISE RABBIT (*to the Third Bunny*): What made you say it wasn't loaded? Where did you look to see?

THIRD BUNNY: Why, ugh ... I looked in here, into these little holes. It was all dark inside.

PAPA WISE RABBIT: You little silly!

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR: But ... why didn't it go off?

PAPA WISE RABBIT: Because it wasn't cocked, that's why.

WORRY-FURRY (*to Nose-in-the-Air*): Now what did I tell you, stupid!
Never try to do what you can't do.

Red Fox and Grey Wolf grow very quiet as they listen to the rabbits.

RED FOX (*tearfully*): Haven't you decided what to do with us yet?

GREY WOLF (*gloomily*): Hur-r-ry and decide!

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR: I'd ... I'd ... I'd...

WORRY-FURRY: I wouldn't say anything if I were you. They'll decide this without you!

PAPA WISE RABBIT (*to the other rabbits*): You'd better step aside for the present! (*To Nose-in-the-Air*) And you stay where you are!



The lady rabbits and the Bunnies move away. Nose-in-the-Air remains by Papa Wise Rabbit's side. He looks up at him miserably.

PAPA WISE RABBIT: You will now go up on to the porch and let the Fox and Wolf out. Understand?

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR (*timidly*): But why?

PAPA WISE RABBIT: Because I say so. Now go and do as you're told.

There's nothing to be done: orders are orders! Trembling with fear, Nose-in-the-Air whisks up on to the porch, lifts the latch hastily and, rolling head over heels down the stairs, hides behind a bush. Wise Rabbit is holding the gun. He is waiting for Red Fox and Grey Wolf to appear.

PAPA WISE RABBIT: You can come out! The door is open!

The door creaks. Red Fox peeps out first.

RED FOX (*hesitantly*): May we come out?

FIRST BUNNY: I'm scared, Pop!

SECOND BUNNY: I'm scared, Mom!

MAMMA WISE RABBIT: I'm scared myself!

Grey Wolf follows Red Fox out of the house.

PAPA WISE RABBIT (*to Red Fox and Grey Wolf*): Paws up!

RED FOX: Were you speaking to us?

PAPA WISE RABBIT: Paws up!

Red Fox and Grey Wolf steal out on to the porch. They raise their paws and stand waiting. The lady rabbits and the Bunnies keep very still. They are curious to see how it will all end.

FIRST BUNNY: Shoot, Pop!

SECOND BUNNY: Shoot, Pop!

THIRD BUNNY: Shoot, Uncle!

PAPA WISE RABBIT: Don't bother me, children! Listen to me, Red Fox, and you, too, Grey Wolf!

RED FOX: We're listening!

GREY WOLF: We're listening!

PAPA WISE RABBIT: The gun is loaded! Is that clear?

RED FOX: Couldn't be clearer!

GREY WOLF (*to Red Fox*): What did I tell you!

PAPA WISE RABBIT: There's a cartridge in every barrel and a charge in every cartridge. One and one make two. Two cartridges and two charges! And there are two of you! But I'm not going to shoot you.



RED FOX (*in a bolder tone*): Some say it's loaded and some say it's not.

GREY WOLF: Ho-hum!

PAPA WISE RABBIT: Not loaded, eh?

Wise Rabbit raises the gun and fires into the air. Red Fox shivers and crouches down in fear. Grey Wolf stands erect, paws hanging limp.

PAPA WISE RABBIT: Paws up! See that path?

RED FOX: Th ... th ... that path? Yes.

GREY WOLF: We see it.

PAPA WISE RABBIT: You will now go down the stairs and along that path. You will not stop until you reach a marsh where the frogs live. And that is where you are going to live, too. I don't ever want to see you in this forest again! Go! When you are out of the forest, you can drop your paws.

Red Fox and Grey Wolf walk down the steps and along the path with lifted paws, their tails between their legs. As soon as they disappear from view behind the trees, the lady rabbits and the Bunnies bound out into the open. They are very happy.

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR: You should've beaten 'em to a pulp, you should've—

WORRY-FURRY: I wouldn't say a word if I were you! We all know just how brave you are!

PAPA WISE RABBIT: All's well that ends well! Grey Wolf and Red Fox will never come back here any more. And it will teach some of us a lesson.

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR: You mean me, don't you?

PAPA WISE RABBIT: Some of us are not going to boast any more and put on airs. They're going to think about others for a change!

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR: You mean me, don't you?

WORRY-FURRY (*to Nose-in-the-Air*): I wouldn't ask if I were you. It's perfectly clear just whom Wise Rabbit means. You'd better ask him to forgive you.

NOSE-IN-THE-AIR: I'm sorry! I promise to be good!

The Bunnies jump up and down in glee and squeal with joy. Wise Rabbit slings the gun over his shoulder and begins to sing a little song. The lady rabbits join in and Nose-in-the-Air sings with the rest.

PAPA WISE RABBIT

A hunter in a forest glade

Fell fast asleep one day.

A rabbit came upon him there

And took his gun away.



ALL

Away, away,
He took his gun away!

MAMMA WISE RABBIT

This turned the rabbit's head, and he
To none the gun would give.
He drove the Fox from out her house
And there began to live.

ALL

To live, to live,
He there began to live!

WORRY-FURRY

His friends all begged to see the gun,
But this was not to be.
Our rabbit told them with a smirk,
"The gun belongs to me!"

ALL

To me, to me,
The gun belongs to me!

BUNNIES

But when the Fox came back again,
He shivered in his shoes—
The gun that he had boasted of
He knew not how to use!

ALL

To use, to use,
He knew not how to use!

PAPA WISE RABBIT

He would have met a dreadful fate
And perished in his prime,
But luckily the rabbits came
And saved him just in time.

ALL

In time, in time,
They saved him just in time!

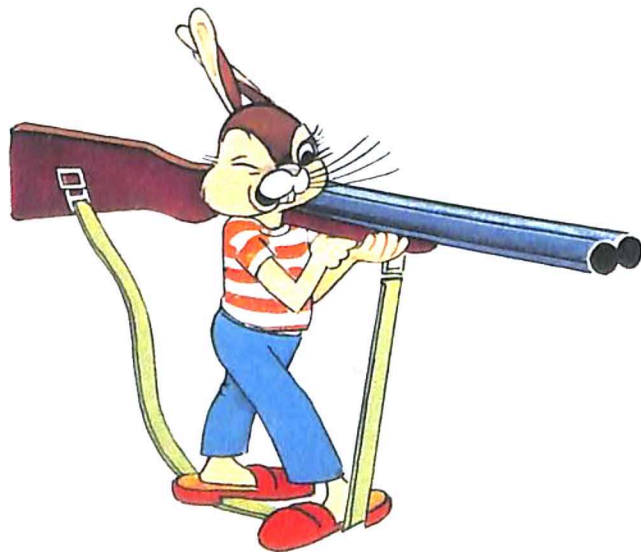
PAPA WISE RABBIT

But now our friend has changed his ways,
He's good as he can be.
He says that he will never more
Disgrace his family.

ALL

Ah, yes! Oh, yes!
He's good as he can be,
We know that he will never more
Disgrace his family!

CURTAIN









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